

## Megan Gibbons – Point of Pride Transcript

[00:00:00] **Megan:** As a senior project planner here at Simantel, I've gotten to participate in a lot of really cool and moving projects with over 20 different clients who are tackling both big goals and really challenging projects. But I've also had the privilege of working with the most talented and wonderful people along the way.

[00:00:15] My greatest single point of pride here at Simantel is their commitment to those people.

[00:00:30] **Misty:** Hey there friends. Thanks so much for checking out our Point of Pride series. In celebration of our 40(ish) anniversary, Simantelites are sharing stories about the work they're most proud of that made a difference for Simantel, the client, and perhaps most importantly themselves. I'm excited to share this story with you from Senior Project Planner, Megan Gibbons.

[00:00:48] While her day to day involves managing projects and resource allocation to keep client work on track, she's also stepped up to help lead a very important initiative. Megan is the co-chair of our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion committee, and has been working hard to make an impact, not only within the walls of Simantel, but also within our local community.

[00:01:06] Have a listen as Megan shares why this work is her point of pride.

[00:01:18] **Megan:** My point of pride at Simantel is participating in and leading the advancement of Simantel's diversity, equity and inclusion efforts as the committee's co-chair. I've had the privilege to be a part of this committee since our very first meeting on September 4<sup>th</sup> of 2020. My name is Megan Gibbons and I'm a Senior Project Planner here at Simantel. I've been here three and a half years.

[00:01:37] In light of numerous publicized events in early 2020 and the countless acts before them spanning centuries, it finally became epically apparent and indisputable to all races, incomes and educational levels that social, political and corporate issues of diversity, equity, inclusion were more than just prevalent. They were, and are, significant challenges too, and struggles within, our society and corporate culture.

[00:01:59] An all-employee meeting in July of 2020, it was announced that Simantel was going to proactively start challenging and improving our own shortcomings via an all employee-led DEI committee. I emailed our HR team immediately to indicate my interest in being a part of the committee. And in September of 2020, we had our very first meeting to discuss our charter, our purpose and our role.

[00:02:19] At this meeting, I volunteered to be the co-chair. I was more than excited to get started. I wanted to move a thousand miles per hour and attack DEI issues from every angle, race, sexual identity, religion, ethnicity, nationality, neurodiversity, etc., from day one. What I quickly realized is if we tried to do everything at once, none of it was gonna see impactful change quickly.

[00:02:41] We're just humans. We only have so much time and resources. We're a small business and we're trying to elicit change on issues our society and humanity have battled for centuries. Putting parameters and priorities on what we would do first and how we would approach it was a great exercise for both me and the committee.

[00:02:58] Our goal is to facilitate an environment that recognizes each person's inherent value as a human to champion fairness and equity in all dimensions of work and life and encourage inclusive conversations which bridge our differences. In order to prioritize all the possible work we could do, we needed a baseline of needs and some trained insight.

[00:03:17] The use of a consultant in 2021 to help us identify our gaps was absolutely critical. Paired with the intentional thinking of our executive development team and Gallup survey on our current performance, we were able to identify the areas of most immediate need, which included: articulating Simantel's DEI vision, ensuring the corporate commitment to and communication of that vision, educating our employees and facilitating different conversations and coordinating our commitment to DEI needs in our local community.

[00:03:44] Our initial challenges largely revolved around logistics, though. How we were to function within the agency walls, who would become members, what would membership entail, what resources we could call upon, and most importantly, what work we could charge ourselves with.

[00:03:57] Most of 2021 was spent trying to answer those questions, and to be honest, work felt really slow and painful at times. The messy initial logistics and housekeeping decisions, which ultimately had set the committee up for longevity, felt more like red tape and hoops jump through. However, after a year of groundwork, it really all began to take shape.

[00:04:15] It's been tough, but energizing work. Watching the committee go from a quiet group of individuals who, while they're passionate about those topics, still felt really uncomfortable talking about them at work, to now being a lively, engaged and vocal group of employees who regularly demonstrate their empowerment to contribute and to make a difference has been very exciting.

[00:04:33] Experiencing the commitment and confidence from our ownership team in their employees to make decisions and activate on important, impactful ways has been so invigorating. Seeing both big and small, tangible wins happen repeatedly, which have helped move the needle forward making this more diverse, equitable and inclusionary every day has been incredibly gratifying and humbling.

[00:04:53] But the challenge of building something totally new from the ground up has also made this a memorable undertaking. We got to design what this committee would be and how it would function. We created a reporting structure in our own success metrics. We even decided how we would accomplish the work we set ourselves.

[00:05:09] It felt very entrepreneurial and empowering as an employee within the agency. While this committee is not a client project or even client facing, our clients are indirectly bearing witness to and benefiting from the improved outcomes of a diverse and inclusive employee base and team dynamic. The ideas solutions and deliverables we partner on are infinitely better for having a diverse team full of inclusionary ideation and execution tactics.

[00:05:31] And the impact on Simantel as a whole has been tremendous. Employees both within the committee and outside are bringing up topics and challenges they previously never would've brought into the workplace.

[00:05:40] Our agency is finding its own DEI blind spots through intentional conversations and actively pursuing outside consultants to reveal them. We now have a safe space and platform to lean into the challenging and sometimes awkward conversations we need to have in order to elicit progress. We're building more inclusive and equitable pools and pathways for both current and future employees to find their way to and within Simantel.

[00:06:02] For example, our recruitment and retention efforts are incorporating the right DEI focused questions and considerations to make a more diverse employee base our reality. And Simantel's really putting its money where its mouth is when we say we want employees to bring their whole selves to work. The committee has provided a way to live out more of everyone's personal values at work.

[00:06:19] For example, the opportunity to lead a committee like this within Simantel has helped me realize more of my own personal convictions. I get to leverage my personal aspiration to help make the world a better place with my employer's goals and platforms. My hopes and efforts get to be magnified by what this committee creates and can do.

[00:06:36] I'm even more motivated and engaged with my non-DEI work at Simantel because of this personal outlet and partnership with the agency. On top of that, this committee has improved my leadership and interpersonal skills. We're tackling issues the world has struggled with since the dawn of humanity, we're fighting generational beliefs and systems which have held for decades and sometimes centuries.

[00:06:56] Meaning I must manage our team's expectations and priorities to impart change where we can, but also encouraging and eliciting enough hope and fire to keep fighting and trying anyway. And I've learned more than I ever anticipated. For one, bringing diverse and passionate minds together has always been thrilling and enlightening.

[00:07:12] Facilitating and participating in conversations where unique experiences and ideas aren't just encouraged, they're required is so stimulating and challenging in the best way. I look forward to our monthly full committee meetings now more than any other meeting on my calendar. Secondly, my co-chair and I get to spend the second half of every monthly meeting facilitating an activity or a challenge to our committee.

[00:07:33] The committee is charged itself with being champions within the agency for improving and growing our diversity, equity and overall inclusion in the day in and day out moments. This means we must be the ones continually pursuing more education and skills to be those champions. Researching, training ourselves and conducting these activities and challenges has been so richly rewarding for my co-chair and I to get to do every month.

[00:07:54] I chose this as my point of pride because while the world is full of crazy talented and inspiring human beings, including my own coworkers, the world is not currently full of crazy ambitious, empowered employee-led DEI committees. This committee inspires me daily. I love to see the heart and soul of our people as they genuinely and authentically work to improve equity and fairness in all aspects of work and life.

[00:08:15] And Simantel didn't have to do this. Our ownership and leadership team were not mandated to provide employees this platform. There was no federal law required to document our improved efforts in this area. What mandated this committee's existence was our own vicious commitment to our people and to making both the agency and the lives who make it up better.

[00:08:34] Simantel and this committee are exactly where I wanna be, and it's more than an honor to be a part of it.

[00:08:46] *Misty:* I'm so proud of Megan, our employee led DEI committee and all Simantelites for the work they've done to promote diversity, equity and inclusion. It's fulfilling for me as an owner to see our employees leading the efforts to create the culture they wish to see. As you've heard over and over again in these point of pride stories, it's all about the people. We strive to make everyone feel

welcomed, valued and free to be their full and authentic selves. Intentionally focusing on DEI will help make all of us as individuals and as an organization even stronger.