



Daisy Auger-Dominguez Knows What it Takes to Build an Inclusive Workplace

The Chief People Officer for VICE Media has spent her career building better workplaces. She's perfected a model: reflect, visualize, act, and persist. Now she's put everything she's learned into her new book, *Inclusion Revolution: The Essential Guide to Dismantling Racial Inequity in the Workplace*.

Alicia Menendez: We hear a lot about diversity and inclusion efforts. If you share my experience, it can feel like a lot of talk and not a lot of action. Daisy Auger-Dominguez wants to change that. She has spent her career working to build better, more welcoming workspaces, and now she's putting everything she's learned into her new book, *Inclusion Revolution: The Essential Guide to Dismantling Racial Inequity in the Workplace*. Daisy is one of the very first guests we ever had on *Latina to Latina*, so if you want to learn about her journey into this work, her personal path, go back to season one, listen to that episode, it is a good one. For the purposes of this conversation, we're going to talk about what it takes to build a truly inclusive workplace and how we can each show up as an ally. *Inclusion Revolution* opens with such a powerful scene from your time at Google. Can you take me back to that moment, both what was happening at Google and what was happening for you as a professional who was supposed to be working on diversity, equity, and inclusion?

Daisy Auger-Dominguez: It's wild to think that that was 2016. I had joined, when I say joined, it feels like I know so many people who are so eager to join companies like Google and these large tech companies. And for me, it was a bit of a roundabout way. They found me. They created a job for me. They made it a bigger job so that I would want to move my family. I'll never forget my manager when I accepted the role, he called to congratulate me and he said, "We're going to change the world, Daisy." And I was all in, Alicia. I was like, this is what I've dreamed of doing my entire life and now I'm finally going to be in the place that gets to shift the way work, and life, and the way we consume, and our content, our products, everything. I was going to be in that place.

Auger-Dominguez: And early on, I started sort of seeing the trailers for the same movie that we've seen over and over again. It was... You're laughing but it's true. I was like, "Oh, I've seen this before." I came in with that responsibility of building a diverse workforce for Google. I was a director of global diversity recruitment. My job was to make sure we were hiring more Black, Hispanic, and female engineers, and others to the organization. But engineers are the lifeblood of the organization, so that was going to be my focus. And I drank the Kool-Aid. I set out to do what I was supposed to do. So I built a plan, built structures. I tried to understand the logic of the organization so that I could build and talk in the same way. I had to learn the language, I had to learn the pacing.

Menendez: It's one of the things that sticks out to me most about the first time we talked that you said something of about the subtlety of who walks into the room first, who sits where along the table, all of those subtle things that you have to pay attention to.

Auger-Dominguez: Because that's culture. It's like a dance. And for mostly women and BIPOC, as I refer to Black, Indigenous and people of color throughout the book, no one coaches us on that. And even when you're coming in as an executive, there're more expectations from you, and you're expected to deliver much more quickly, but you're not giving any passes. You're just like me, like come in and operate. And I was the highest ranking Latina within the people function at Google, which is thousands of employees. When I would ask my team, what do we do? Will we hire diverse talent? No, no, no, no. What does diverse mean? They're like, "Well, Daisy, we're not allowed to say that." I was like, "Well, if we're not allowed to say what we're doing, how are we going to actually deliver on the outcomes that we're supposed to be delivering on?"

Auger-Dominguez: And in my book, I share the story of the day that I was presenting my big strategy, the strategy that my team had been building for months. We had actually done a design sprint. We spent three days doing a deep dive on how do you reconstruct the hiring process so that it can be more inclusive. And these bright, bright mind came up with all of these solutions. We packaged them together. We put them in front of the leaders and it's like nothing. Everyone just looks at it and says, okay, but this is not scalable. Is this going to build the right solution? And by the way, the solutions that we recommended, not rocket science, Alicia, all things that in the last couple of years we've heard from others, Hey, let's go recruit in places where there are more Black and Hispanic software engineers. Let's build up those offices. Instead of having them come to places that are highly unwelcoming to them, like San Francisco, let's go to them in places where they have built in communities and where we can make sure that we are building the right workplace communities for them.

Auger-Dominguez: Atlanta, for example, Southern states, things like let's rethink the interview process so that it feels a little less dense and confusing for the folks who have never walked through a training on how to be the proper tech person in this world. Let's just make this a little bit more human and inclusive. Well, we've done that, but is that truly fair? Are we lowering the hiring bar by doing that? These were the real comments that were coming to me. And as I wrote in the introduction to my book, every other question from my manager was, "But Daisy, you're not getting to the root cause of why we can't hire more Black and Hispanic software engineers."

Menendez: This is my favorite part of the story.

Auger-Dominguez: "You're not getting to it." And it was, I didn't write every single time, but Alicia, it felt like hours of being pushed on why I was not coming up with the right solution. And all of a sudden, I just pause. And I said, "racism. Racism is the root cause of our problem. We have a system that has been designed and to be racist from the very beginning. And until we change every step of that process to be anti-racist, we will not get different outcomes." And as you can hear from my emotion, that's pretty much how I said it to him by that point. But I was still measured. I wasn't yelling at him, but I was emotional. I said it just like that. And the room went quiet.

Menendez: Whereas you write in the book, qui-et. I notice all those extra vowels, because it really, it matters.

Auger-Dominguez: It was extra as like quieeeeeeeet. There was an entire room of highly accomplished type A executives who respond to things like this, nobody responded. And then there was just sort of the typical defensiveness, but they weren't ready. They weren't ready to respond to it. And racism felt like a loaded word to them that I was using as a weapon against them. They didn't see that I was not weaponizing the moment, I was clarifying it. But it's easier to feel like the word race is being weaponized against you when you're not equipped to be able to address where you have failed in that scheme of experiences and relationships. And that's what happens.

Menendez: And getting equipped with that skill is one that you dive into in the book. You lay out a formula in Inclusion Revolution that I think, and I think you agree, applies to a lot of life that is not about workplace inclusion. And that is to reflect, visualize, act and persist with a heavy emphasis on the first three actionable verbs. Can you give me an example of how that plays out in the workplace? How we can each use that in our own workplace?

Auger-Dominguez: Absolutely. When there's a problem, I always say, pause, what are we solving for? Let's reflect on this. And by reflecting is, it's trying to identify again, the root causes of problems, but what is happening really in this moment? Yesterday, I had team member who came back to me, was a white woman who came back to me, really alarmed because she said, "Well, a Black woman just said that we are objectifying Black people in our content. How do you respond to that, Daisy?" And I said, "You don't." I was like, "You don't respond to that."

Auger-Dominguez: You acknowledge that that is how she's feeling. And you take a step back to think about, is that true? What do our images look like? What is the last time that I spoke to a Black woman in the workplace to try to understand what her experience is like? When was the last time that I looked outside of our everyday work to inform myself on imagery and storytelling and content and audiences in a way that's more inclusive and that's authentic to the Black experience? That's reflection. That's when you think about your own experience, what you know and what you don't know. And this is where I say, we got to be okay with sitting in discomfort because sometimes that's really where the learnings happen. And it should feel uncomfortable, Alicia, to realize that you have fallen short. It should feel uncomfortable.

Menendez: I appreciate it that you talk about, this is what you do for a living. You still took an assessment that came back to you and said, you have a preference for younger people. You have a bias in favor of lighter skinned people. I'm glad you put it in the book, because I think people think you get to a point where you are biased free.

Auger-Dominguez: Oh gosh, no. We never are, because we're socially conditioned from an early age to be favoring certain things. And Alicia, every single day, my team hears me say this to the point that they're a little over it. I was like every single day, I have moments where I pause and I say, wait a second, I have a bias towards that. I have a bias towards this language that I'm using. I have a bias towards this approach. I have a bias towards this group. Sometimes I have a bias, a sweet spot for certain people versus others that leans me in one way or another. And as head of people at a large media company, I have to unbias my decisions and create opportunities that are equitable for everyone. And so, that reflection is the heavy duty piece.

Auger-Dominguez: The next step is, okay, let me visualize who do I want to be? How do I want to show up? What's the experience that I want others to have when they are with me? If I am

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a manager, I want my team to feel that there's a light to their work, that there's joy to their work, that there's clarity in what they have to do. And so what do I need to do to deliver that for them? This is where you visualize, how am I going to show up? What are the resources I'm going to find, purchase, borrow, whatever that looks like, that's the visualizing piece. And then the next stage is the action. And the bulk of the book is focused on the action. And it's built on the employee life journey.

Auger-Dominguez: That's an HR term of really what happens from the first time someone reaches out to you, Alicia, that they're interested in hiring you, to when they hire you, to when you get onboarded, to when you're performing on your job and receiving performance management, to when you grow and you advance and eventually you leave. That is your employee life journey. The bulk of the book is focused on what are those entry points during those critical stages in the employee life journey, where as a manager in particular, and also as a colleague and aspiring manager, I should be thinking far more inclusively. What are the that I'm not listening to? What are the things that I should be doing? I should be listening more intently. I should be reflecting on my work. I should be, I don't know, recruiting for more diverse talent, promoting more diverse talent, thinking more inclusively in the performance management process, who have I talked to lately? Who haven't I talked to lately? Who do I give more credit to? Who do I instantly discount in my team? That's the action part.

Menendez: And assessing the instruments and tools you use to do all of these things. So you use the, one of the more provocative things you say is that maybe CVs, maybe resumes, like just got to go out the window because what do they really tell about a person?

Auger-Dominguez: And we've been talking about this for years, but we get so stuck on the systems and the processes that have been given to us that we don't question them. Like this is the way to recruit, well, why do we recruit this way? Part of that action is about questioning old modes of operating and introducing new modes of operating. And recognizing that takes work. The reason why we have the organization that we have now is because these processes are broken. We like to say that the system is broken. It absolutely is. I like to say, from an HR perspective, the processes are broken. So we have to reimagine the processes and reinvent them.

Menendez: Where I think we all have been is that moment where someone incredibly committed comes in, they change the systems and the processes, things feel nominally better, but we still watch the biggest opportunities go to white non-Hispanic people. How do you do the assessment of, do you stay, or do you go when it's not happening at a micro level, when it is happening at a macro level?

Auger-Dominguez: There isn't a simple answer to it. My standard answer when people ask me, how do you know when it's time to leave is that I have different parameters that I gauge throughout. Am I doing work that's meaningful? Am I doing it with people that I like, and that I feel like and respect me? I spend a lot of time in the book and with my teams talking about decision making criteria, because when we have clear decision making criteria, then it's not about opinions. It's about facts. Like this is how we do things. And so that's my decision making criteria. And whenever I'm feeling, and I've left companies when I have felt disrespected, undervalued and that my work was not going anywhere. I've also made measured decisions based on what my next step was, what was available to me next,

because I have had to maintain my family for my entire career, but these are real economic decisions that we all have to make. And I write this in the book.

Auger-Dominguez: What I feel is most painful about suffering trauma at work is not just the trauma itself and the angst and the pain, is feeling that you don't have an out. And so my advice often, and mostly it's young women of color that come to ask me for advice is, have your exit plan. Always have an exit plan because things can go wrong at any moment. And when that happens, you should not make decisions because you do not believe that you can make a safe and healthy exit. You should make the decisions based on the data that's in front of you.

Auger-Dominguez: The reason why the fourth stage of our model is persist, is because I do believe that the only way to really drive change in this work is to persist at it. And by persist I don't mean that you need to suffer in dignity and that you need to suffer in pain, what I mean is the that we stop too quickly at this work. And by we, I mean organizations and leaders and managers, we hire a black person, we hire a Latino, we hire an LGBTQ leader, and then we're like, we're good. Check the box. We're done. We don't realize that we have to keep at it. That hiring an Only is not enough because you and I both know the experience of being the Onlys, and it's incredibly isolating and it's incredibly painful. And guess what? It doesn't move the needle. Even as amazing as we can be, it doesn't do it. But here's the good news, you don't have to do it alone. There are others around you.

Auger-Dominguez: So my advice is also, look around you. Sometimes there are partners that are invisible to you. That will just take a little bit of that weight off of you and do some of the work with you. It's always great to have someone at the top with power, but you may not be able to get to them right away. So, who are the other influencers in the organization that can get the attention of the people in power, that can get you the resources that you need, and that frankly can sometimes just give you that pat in the back, that plus one that, Hey, I'm so glad you said that Alicia, in that meeting, because there's nothing like the credibility that a senior leader can give you in a meeting that all of a sudden makes everybody pay attention and say, well, maybe I should invest in that. Maybe I should support that work.

Menendez: I recognize that I've been talking about out a lot of this from the vantage point of someone who's been aggrieved in the workplace. Of course, none of us are without fault. And all of us have to play the role of being allies and being co-conspirators.

Auger-Dominguez: Yes.

Menendez: One of my favorite parts of Inclusion Revolution was about allyship. You write, "Allyship is not an identity. Allyship is a continuous process of learning and building relationships through trust, consistency, and accountability." You also talk about action through solidarity, not in front, not behind, but beside.

Auger-Dominguez: That's exactly it, Alicia. You don't get a cap that says, ally, you don't get a special cookie because you're an ally. You get to live in a world where you are contributing to making it better. That's what you get for being an ally. But the allyship pieces work and we all have to do it. You and I have to do it. To be an ally, I have to keep at it. I wish I had had allies throughout my career. I have had to amazing allies. I attribute that to why I have been able to do what I've done, but I wish I had other allies throughout my career that would've stopped and said, Daisy, what is reducing your ability to do what you want to do? What is getting in your way? What is the obstacle that's getting in your way? And how can I,

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whoever it was that had more power than me, how can I help reduce those obstacles to you? That's allyship. That's real commitment to seeing someone else advance and grow, and you using your power and your privilege. And we don't realize that this is about continual work and it's the work of being human with each other.

Menendez: Daisy, congratulations.

Auger-Dominguez: Honored to be here.

Menendez: Thank you as always for listening. *Latina to Latina* is executive produced and owned by Juleyka Lantigua and me, Alicia Menendez. Paulina Velasco is our producer. Manuel Bedoya is our marketing lead. Kojin Tashiro is our associate sound designer and mixed this episode. We love hearing from you. It makes our day. Email us at ola@latinatolatina.com. Slide into our DMs on Instagram, tweet us @latinatolatina. Check out our merchandise that is on our website, latinatolatina.com/shop. And remember, please subscribe or follow us on RadioPublic, Apple Podcast, Google Podcast, Goodpods, wherever you are listening right now. Every time you share this podcast, every time you share an episode, every time you leave a review, it helps us to grow as a community.

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