



SALES AND MARKETING ROUNDTABLE #262

Perspectives on Fostering More Inclusive Communities

with Christopher Ridenhour

Thank you to everyone who attended Sales and Marketing Roundtable #262!

NOTE: To provide anonymity during the Roundtable discussion, participants and their communities will not be identified.

ABOUT OUR GUEST

This week's Juneteenth Roundtable was especially meaningful. We were honored to welcome Christopher Ridenhour, President & CEO of Inspired2Results!, for a powerful conversation on how to create more inclusive communities.



Christopher is a nationally respected speaker and educator who shared thought-provoking perspectives on how communities can cultivate environments where every resident and team member feels seen, heard, and valued. We look forward to seeing you there!

Christopher travels nationwide partnering with organizations interested in building measurable and lasting improvements in staff retention, engagement, resident involvement, and revenue through leadership development, training, and coaching. Please reach out at christohermotivates@yahoo.com for a free exploratory conversation.



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FRESH PERSPECTIVES

- **INCLUSION STARTS WITH SMALL, DAILY ACTIONS** - You don't need a formal initiative to build an inclusive culture. Simple moments, like showing interest in someone's story, lay the groundwork for trust and connection across teams.
- **VALUE AND APPRECIATION ARE UNIVERSAL CURRENCIES** - Diversity goes beyond race or background, it's about honoring experiences and perspectives. When people feel valued, they're more likely to contribute meaningfully.
- **IF YOU'RE NOT FILLED, YOU CAN'T FUEL OTHERS** - Like a battery without charge, people can't energize their teams if they're drained themselves. Authenticity and care must be practiced—not just preached—to create culture that lasts.
- **DON'T DIY DEI—IT TAKES REAL COURAGE AND SUPPORT** - Doing the work of inclusion alone often leads to burnout or stalled progress. Creating real psychological safety takes shared effort, consistent leadership, and a willingness to lean into discomfort.
- **RELATIONSHIPS BUILD THE BRIDGE TO BELONGING** - When there's equity and trust in a relationship, there's space for honesty, growth and even grace when mistakes happen. Connection makes inclusion real.
- **START WITH ONE BITE-SIZED GOAL** - Instead of trying to fix everything at once, focus on a small, meaningful step. Whether it's changing how you run a meeting or reaching out to a colleague, action builds momentum.

LINKS & CONTACT INFO

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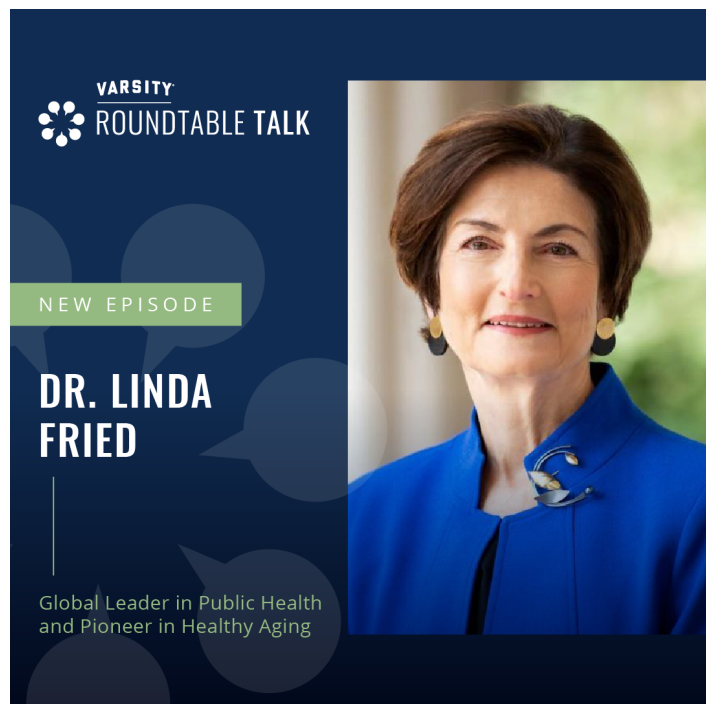
COMING UP ON VARSITY'S ROUNDTABLE!

Please join our next Roundtable gathering on Thursday, June 26 at 12 p.m. ET, 11 a.m. CT and 9 a.m. PT. We will be joined by Hersh Fernandes of Dorvie. Hersh will discuss the opportunities to create sales momentum with concierge services.

THE NEWEST EPISODE OF VARSITY'S PODCAST

Varsity's podcast, Roundtable Talk, is about longevity and aging. Each episode features a discussion with an industry expert about how to solve the many mature market challenges facing brands today.

The most recent episode features a conversation with Dr. Linda Fried, a world-renowned geriatrician, public health expert, and Dean of Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health. A pioneer in the science of healthy aging and frailty, Dr. Fried has dedicated her career to understanding how we can build systems and communities that support longer, healthier, and more purposeful lives.





How can communities respectfully and meaningfully celebrate Juneteenth even if they lack racial diversity among residents or staff?

Christopher encouraged a broader, more human-centered definition of diversity, one that starts with recognizing each person as completely unique, while also acknowledging the traits and values we all share, like the need to feel valued and appreciated. He emphasized that diversity isn't just about race or background; it's about the sum of perspectives, life experiences and voices in a community or organization.

He pointed out that meaningful celebration of Juneteenth—or any cultural observance—doesn't have to hinge on demographics. Instead, it should be part of a deeper commitment to making people feel respected and seen every day of the year, not just on holidays. The real key, he said, is to "bake in" value and appreciation into the daily rhythms of the organization—from meetings to team shifts—so that the culture reflects the ideals it talks about.



How can sales and marketing teams ensure authenticity in their celebrations of Juneteenth beyond just image selection and voice?

Authenticity starts at the top, but everyone has the power to influence their surroundings, no matter their role. Christopher stressed that if you're not personally showing up with authenticity, you can't expect it from others. It's about being intentional and creating a culture where people don't just show up to do a job, but actually *show up* in a meaningful way.

He used a great metaphor: a 9-volt battery only gives a charge if it has energy. Same goes for people. Are you leaving others charged or drained after your interactions? Real authenticity in marketing and sales comes from how team members live the mission and values every day, not just from external branding.

He wrapped it up by saying we need the courage to have honest, sometimes uncomfortable conversations. That's the real path to making the feel-good messages on websites align with everyday reality. And yeah, if there were a "courage pill," we'd all be better off.



What traits, programs, or leadership styles help create a welcoming and inclusive culture? Where has DEI worked well, and what advice do you have for organizations and communities seeking more diversity, especially among residents?

Christopher reflected on his experiences with a few resident councils across different organizations and pointed out how tough and sometimes risky it can feel to even bring up DEI. There are financial concerns, misunderstandings about what diversity and inclusion really mean, and a general fear of saying the wrong thing. But he stressed that bravery is essential: creating a culture where *everyone*—from CNAs to executives to interns—feels safe enough to speak up and contribute without fear of being dismissed or judged.

He emphasized that before real progress can happen, communities need to pause and ask: *What does diversity mean to each of us?* That basic, shared understanding is often missing. Just having that conversation is a huge first step.

There are tons of resources out there, from skilled consultants to impactful books like *How to Be an Antiracist*, though he acknowledged that even the title of that book can be triggering for some. That fear of discomfort, he said, is exactly what stops a lot of meaningful dialogue from getting off the ground.



What advice would you give to someone who feels unsure about how to begin open, honest conversations on sensitive topics?

Christopher said that before diving into the “hard stuff” in conversations, like sensitive topics around race or inclusion, we first need to focus on basic decency and humanity. People should be able to show up to work without feeling belittled, dismissed, or worn down by toxic sarcasm or subtle jabs. That kind of psychological safety is foundational.

He emphasized the importance of self-awareness and personal accountability, especially for leaders. Are we really showing up for the people who are counting on us? If we lead with curiosity and appreciation instead of blame or guilt, we create space for real connection. Even something as simple as introducing yourself and genuinely asking someone how they’re doing can go a long way.

Ultimately, Christopher acknowledged that this kind of work takes courage. It's not easy, and it's not something you can do well on your own. Trying to “DIY DEI” often hits a wall because of personal discomfort or fear. But leaning into that discomfort is exactly what helps build inclusion and trust.

QUESTIONS

AN ATTENDEE SHARED A STORY ABOUT TELLING A BLACK FRIEND ABOUT A HOUSE FOR SALE IN HIS MOSTLY WHITE NEIGHBORHOOD. HIS FRIEND SAID, "I DON'T WANT TO BE THE FIRST ONE," WHICH OPENED HIS EYES TO THE CHALLENGES OF BEING THE ONLY PERSON OF COLOR IN A SPACE. IT'S SOMETHING THAT'S STUCK WITH HIM THROUGHOUT HIS CAREER IN A LESS DIVERSE INDUSTRY.

Christopher appreciated that this participant's insight came from a genuine friendship, where there was trust and openness. He emphasized that relationships built on value and appreciation create space for grace and growth, especially when things get tough. He pointed out that getting to know people across departments, just as fellow human beings, is a powerful but often overlooked step toward inclusion.

It doesn't take a big strategy, just simple acts like saying good morning, grabbing coffee together, and being curious. That kind of connection builds stronger teams, boosts morale, and ultimately benefits residents too. It all starts with showing up, being open, and building relationships one conversation at a time.

AN ATTENDEE SHARED THAT SHE VALUES DIVERSITY BUT WORKS IN A VERY HOMOGENOUS COMMUNITY WHERE DEI ISN'T PRIORITIZED OR WELL UNDERSTOOD. SHE JOINED THE CALL TO SEE IF OTHERS FACE SIMILAR CHALLENGES.

Christopher acknowledged the challenge of working in a homogenous environment and emphasized that diversity can still exist in experiences, even if it's not immediately visible. He encouraged a mindset of "*get curious, not furious*"—staying open, asking questions, and resisting the urge to judge or shut down when faced with something unfamiliar or different.

A GUEST NOTED THAT PEOPLE OFTEN PREFER COMMUNITIES WHERE THEY FEEL ALIGNED, WHETHER BY VALUES, LIFESTYLE, OR BACKGROUND. HE RAISED THE QUESTION OF HOW THAT DESIRE FOR SAMENESS PLAYS INTO SENIOR LIVING CHOICES, WONDERING IF SOME OLDER ADULTS PRIORITIZE COMFORT AND SHARED BELIEFS OVER DIVERSITY, AND HOW COMMUNITIES ARE ADDRESSING THAT DYNAMIC.

Christopher compared senior living marketing to college tours. People often connect with the "tour guide" (i.e., the sales and marketing team), but what they find after moving in may not match that initial vibe. He noted that creating a truly inclusive and authentic community requires more than brochures, it demands cultural follow-through.

He emphasized the importance of self-awareness and recognizing our role in a larger generational and social process. Not everyone will be open to change, and trying to fix everything at once can lead to burnout. Instead, he encouraged setting *bite-sized, actionable goals* like sharing a personal story in a meeting or adjusting an agenda to invite more voices. Small, consistent actions build momentum and can lead to real cultural shifts.

EMILY FROM VARSITY SHARED A SIMPLE BUT POWERFUL PRACTICE FROM HER ORGANIZATION: DURING WEEKLY MEETINGS, TEAM MEMBERS SHARE SOMETHING THEY'RE PASSIONATE ABOUT. IT SPARKS UNEXPECTED CONNECTIONS AND HELPS TO BUILD A MORE INCLUSIVE CULTURE.

Christopher praised Emily's example, emphasizing that fostering inclusion doesn't have to start with a formal DEI initiative. It can be as simple as showing genuine interest in others. He highlighted the power of small, natural actions that build connection and trust, saying it's the foundational stuff that prepares us for deeper cultural work.

Instead of focusing only on visible differences, he encouraged getting to know people beyond the surface—what they care about, what excites them—because everyone wants to feel valued and appreciated, no matter who they are.

DEREK FROM VARSITY SHARED A STORY ABOUT AN AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMAN WHO SAID SHE MOVED TO A COMMUNITY TO BE WITH FELLOW VILLANOVA PROFESSORS, NOT TO BE A TRAILBLAZER. AFTER A LIFETIME OF BREAKING BARRIERS, SHE WANTED CONNECTION, NOT SYMBOLISM. HER STORY REINFORCED CHRISTOPHER'S POINT THAT INCLUSION IS ABOUT SHARED HUMANITY, NOT JUST IDENTITY.

Christopher responded by acknowledging the deep weariness that can come with always being the “only one.” Sometimes, people just want to enjoy simple things—like a trip to Target or a night at the theater—without carrying the weight of being a trailblazer.

He stressed the importance of asking, “What do you want to experience here?” as a way to foster authentic conversations and ensure a true fit for each resident. Ultimately, he emphasized that inclusion starts with genuine interest, not checklists, and that the goal should be creating environments where people can fully show up as themselves, for the good of residents, teams, and the entire community.