

THAT MAKES CENTS



Season 3 Episode 9

Promoting gender equality at the workplace: A conversation with NextUp

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Guests: Sarah Alter, President & CEO, NextUp

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Bobby: Hi everybody, I'm Bobby Stephens, and welcome—or welcome back—to *That Makes Cents*. This is the podcast where we discuss consumer trends to explore their impact on both businesses and our everyday lives.

Today we are talking about an important topic that truly impacts our day-to-day lives: creating equitable workplaces.

It's really no doubt that organizations who are committed to bringing a positive change are taking steps to building a better and more equitable workplace. However, there are several issues, such as pay disparity, lack of advancement opportunities, mental and

physical health impacts of the pandemic, and more, which are front and center, really not only for women but for all genders in the workplace.

Employers are also feeling the impact of the Great Resignation—or as some are calling it now, a Great Reshuffle. Millions of employees have exited the workforce, to capitalize on virtual opportunities and to maintain the flexibility required to care for their families—or maybe even both.

So, to spearhead the positive change, inaction is just no longer a choice for companies; rather, they must acknowledge that their workforce is increasingly

changing and consider the holistic needs of employees.

So, in this episode, we are really going to focus on how companies can attract, retain, and foster talent by creating a more humane work environment through gender-centered design.

Joining me today are two amazing guests. First, Sarah Alter, president and CEO of the nonprofit organization aiming to empower women in business, NextUp. And my colleague Tiffany Mawhinney, a principal here at Deloitte. Thank you both for joining me, and I'll turn it over to you to tell our listeners just a little bit more about your

background and your current role. Sarah, why don't we start with you?

Sarah: Well, Bobby, thank you so very much for welcoming me to this pivotal conversation today. Our collaboration and partnership with Deloitte has been a labor of love.

It absolutely ladders back to our mission, right? We're a nonprofit—as you shared—a 501(c)3, and our mission is to advance all women in business. And we go about doing that in a couple of different ways. We have over 16,000 members and growing across North America, and then we've got 21 regions that are run by 1,000 of our members who volunteer; they step up and bring our mission to life.

And then we partner with over 900 companies, and so Deloitte is one of those most treasured and dear partnerships. But we provide leadership development, we provide networking, and more importantly now, we provide corporate insights and solutions for C-suite leaders because women aren't broken. They don't need to be fixed; it's that culture and that inadequate infrastructure that holds women back. And, as you've already stated, particularly now, in this never-normal world that we live in.

Tiffany: Hi, it's fun to be on this with you, Bobby. We usually don't get to do fun podcasts. And, Sarah, it's a pleasure as always to be with you.

As Bobby mentioned, I work as a Deloitte principal in our Customer and Marketing practice. I actually focus on the retail and consumer products sector, helping our clients think through growth strategies around commerce, merchandising, products, and marketing.

And in that role, I've actually had the honor of serving two large accounts. One in the beverage sector, another in the apparel sector, and I think, you know, when I was doing this article with Sarah and

thinking about what companies and tactics we're seeing in the market, within consumer there's been some very innovative strategies to think about not only the headquarters, but the workforce that sits in the field.

And I was really proud of the effort that we put forward here in being holistic across, thinking about the impacts that women have had to navigate over the course of the last three to four years, and probably even more.

I am also a working mother of two; I have a 13- and a 10-year-old at home. Prior to Deloitte, I actually started my career working in field operations in the consumer sector. So, I feel like I've kind of got a good grasp as well—from a personal standpoint—of what I would love to see myself navigating through and succeeding, and helping other women lift up as well.

So, really excited to be here and talk about the paper that we've pulled together, and then what we're seeing in the market around this important topic.

Bobby: Thank you, guys both, for the background. It seems like we've got the right two guests here. And I'm excited for our conversation, for sure.

Sarah: (laughs) Us too.

Bobby: Before we dive into the topic, Sarah, you mentioned this—and I guess I'll paraphrase a little bit—that Deloitte and NextUp have been great partners for years now.

Sarah: Indeed.

Bobby: And, you know, together are working to really try to play at one of those crucial roles in creating better workplaces. Could you just share a little bit more about the partnership journey?

Tiffany: Sure. It's been almost 15-plus years now that we have been working with NextUp—formerly known as the Network of Executive Women—as an

important organization that really shares the values of advancing women's progress in the workplace.

I personally have had the honor of serving as what we call our ambassador, which is sort of a connective tissue between the two organizations. I started out in that role many moons ago as a manager, and it was truly such an important experience for me, because at the time, I was a young mother and it was the first time that I ever really had a venue where I was surrounded by other executive women also working through a lot of these different topics, considerations, with work and life and community, and how do we balance a lot of those things?

You know, through the 19 chapters that NextUp has, we have active participation across most of those chapters from Deloitte, but probably one of the things that I've loved the most over the years is our ability to really pick topics of interest and create some really provocative thought leadership pieces together.

Those have included, whether industry topics such as, you know, mobile firsts—this whole thing around what's going to happen with these iPhones, that was a few years ago.

Sarah: (laughs)

Tiffany: They seem to be important, whether it's about the human experience, and really talking about what that means across all the different elements of industry and how we think about ways of working. We've done work around Women 2020, and different diversity, equity, [and] inclusion frameworks that companies could think about, and now, most recently, this paper around creating equitable workplaces. So, it's been awesome. We have a great partnership. Sarah and I have been able—pre-COVID, we did a couple junkets together across different conferences, and it's just an amazing energy when two companies can come together,

like I said, around shared values, and then talk about that with other women.

And it's just really empowering, and you feel the momentum behind you.

Sarah: And Tiffany, remember, we also did that study, we demystified the Gen Z.

Tiffany: That's true, that's right.

Sarah: Tiffany and me, right? We had that great study, too.

Tiffany: I forgot, yes. That was a big one—also still relevant today.

Even three years later, people are still trying to figure out, what exactly is this generation going to do? That was a good one. Absolutely.

Bobby: Well, speaking of it around research that you've done, I am curious about the latest report—that's why we're here, and that we partnered on—creating more equitable workplaces through gender-centered design.

So, Sarah, what drove the team to research this specific topic at this specific time?

Sarah: We've all been living this journey—both personally and professionally—and what we saw during the pandemic was that so many leaders in organizations, they had to pivot, right? They had to adapt their workplaces—just how people were doing their jobs and how their companies were running themselves, and how people were living their lives. And what happened, is you saw a whole lot of creativity, and you saw a whole lot of adaptability. And what you saw, in turn—and, again, that was in response to the global pandemic, to economic dynamics, to political dynamics—but you saw employees then saying, “Hey, guess what? You know what? I like having greater flexibility now. You know, I don't want to walk away from that,” and you've already alluded to it. You know, you see that then play out in terms of like the Great—and I agree with

you, it's a Reshuffle, not necessarily the Resignation—but we saw that and said, “OK, well who are the better leaders, corporate brands, and organizations? What are the better practices that exist?” And, you know, we could absolutely tap into a whole host of the incredible clients that Deloitte has, right? And then we just so happened to partner with a lot of them as well. And so, from our partnership we were able to identify: OK, well, what are those key pillars—and I know you—Tiffany's going to get into that in greater detail—that you need to be focusing on, as a leader and an organization? And then, more importantly, what are some examples that exist of people who have been able to very successfully navigate their way through it? And all of it was focused—and, again, it ties back to our North Star, which is our mission: advancing all women in business. So, how does an organization need to transform or redesign itself so that it is gender-centric and focused?

Bobby: Awesome. Well, let's build on that. Let's dive right into the topic starting with—I guess I'll call it an interesting, and rather, to some extent, alarming fact that really stood out to me in the report. That fact was that 80% of US workers who have exited the workforce by choice, or due to job disruption, as of September 2020, were women.

I mean, I think it's really a remarkable number, and I just want to begin by asking, what are workplaces missing that are driving women to exit? Maybe Sarah, we start with you—and, Tiffany, would love to hear you build on it.

Sarah: Well, the one that I'll start with, the one that really jumped out to me—and I'm, I'm going to let Tiffany address some of the other core pillars—but it's that support for the caregiver, right? And the reality is, so much of what you saw historically in business organizations was support for the pregnant mother. You didn't necessarily see it extend beyond the mother, to the father, to parents in general. And people define families in very different ways, right? You didn't see

it extend beyond the infant, all the way to the fact that, hey, often times we have to parent or care give for our elderly parents. And so, for me, when it played out because there were all these disruptions, and what—let's just start with parents.

What we were relying on is childcare in school was some of that, right? You know, it was a built-in form of childcare. And so, when that was disrupted and that disappeared, you saw the detriment—the preponderance—of the disadvantage happened to women. And you've got stats out there that said, “Hey, um...?” You know, there was a great survey that three universities put out there, and they said that when it comes to housework, typically 79% of all women are the primary, or they're primarily responsible, for housework, and only 28% of men. When it came to childcare, 66% of women were primarily responsible as opposed to, you know, 24% for men. And so, you saw this play out, and then there was just this negative ripple effect to women, and that it was disrupting their career, it was holding them back. And they were looking to leaders in organizations to respond to this change of circumstances; they needed the leaders in the organizations to step up and transform the support mechanisms, services, policies—you name it.

So, you've got great organizations then, like a Kimberly-Clark, where they said, “Hey, we want to broaden that focus and support, and we want it to be across the board because it's from infant, you know, all the way to illness, or even, eventually, death.” But I know Tiffany has ideas on some of the other pillars.

Tiffany: Bobby, you were asking about what had workplaces been missing, to date. You know, I look at it almost as COVID as kind of the buildup of ripping off a bandage and it exposing many things. None of this was necessarily new. Some of the things I'm going to talk about—the gender pay gap has been talked about for over two decades. We've recently seen studies, again, where there's still,

even if you look within the racial divide of that, you're looking at this notion of intersectionality and some cohorts being even more compounded with that, being people of color, or women of color, that are really trying to work through that lack of acknowledgment of the implications of that intersectionality as well.

The other piece is just how companies were really able to deal with what is trauma, right? And I love the way that we talked about trauma in the paper and actually acknowledged the fact that there was a lot of it over the course of the last three years, and a lot of folks had to deal with a lot of different things. Whether that was caregiving support, whether that was racial tensions that we had in this country, the political divides that we're seeing increasingly causes a lot of mental well-being concerns that I think, finally, they—a lot of these things were always there, but we had an acknowledgement and a compounding over time of some very traumatic things that happened to all of us. And companies started to recognize, like, "Wait, this has always been here. Maybe we should do something, or else we're going to see further ramifications."

The other piece that I think is interesting is, for many years, we've talked about sponsorship, coaching, and mentorship with women and that you need to find your pocket of people that you can go to and talk to and have these advocates for you. The flip side of this now has also been this conversation around boundaries, right? And so how can women actually still establish and have careers, work with those coaching, sponsorship, and mentorship tracks, but also still advocate for their own boundaries, in order to balance all the things that I just talked about? So, I think there's still work to be done. Companies have set up a lot of interesting programs that we'll talk about around whether it's mental and physical health, consistency, and flexibility, but the work still needs to happen in terms of bringing some of these things into action.

Bobby: Well, maybe we go there; maybe we go to some examples. I think you guys really hit on some good principles, sort of restate the overall mental and physical health—especially given what's going on in caregiver support, just the consistency, the intersectionality, and then allies, and having that place you can go to. And I'm glad to hear Deloitte takes this seriously.

I know we do—and we'll talk about that in a second—but Tiffany, at the beginning, you also mentioned some of your client experience and your previous experience in the field. Maybe we could start with you sharing an example or two of how other organizations, not named Deloitte—

Tiffany: (laughs) Right.

Bobby: —have applied these principles to start to move this in the right direction.

Tiffany: I've seen a lot of movement around the consistency, predictability, and flexibility. It's an interesting balance between two companies in the article—one being American Express, the other being Gap—and the reason I like the balance of these two is one shows kind of a hybrid work model where you can work towards more consistency, predictability around your life, where you have to balance caregiver support.

Also with the broadcasts and pragmatic delivery of benefits, right? Whether that be mental and physical health, and just more ease and access to see it, balanced against a company like The Gap, where this actual stabilizing of schedules that we talk about in the article—it's fascinating for me coming from field operations, and we've seen it a lot over the past decade of increasing part-time employment in lieu of full-time employment, and then how do you balance those multiple schedules? The Gap made some really great strides in implementing a more routine schedule base for its field operations staff and saw some really incremental and powerful increases in productivity because of it.

I think this shows that, you know, companies can make some of these strides. We hear a lot around, "Oh, if we move that direction, we're going to have, incremental changes in productivity that are negative." It's the same conversation that we've heard about the four-day workweek that we've seen piloted in a lot of different countries—some of them actually as companies, such as Unilever, which they've seen and acknowledged interesting results there.

So, I think as we continue to have more momentum, you're going to see companies such as Nestle as well that really focus on that mental and physical benefits piece of apps, and having things where folks can actually feel more comfortable about their own financial well-being, and health and well-being around lifestyle spending accounts, wellness, and subscription apps. I remember—and I know we don't want to necessarily talk about Deloitte, but—even on our journey of where we've come from, we've made major strides in transparency of where all these cohorts actually sit, which I think is a big momentous occasion as well, when you can actually look around your companies acknowledging that we have improvements to make, and all of those companies that we talked about in the article have some form of that.

And then at the same time, we've actually set some pretty aggressive goals, and are trying to move the needle with that, and accordingly, there's various programs that have come up—especially around our well-being and benefits—that I think are quite exciting, and now it's a matter of getting people aware of them and using them, and then talking about it with their other peers to actually see and hold each other accountable.

Bobby: So, you've mentioned something and alluded to it in the examples. One is around just really homing in on the feeling of safety and security, right? The notion of this is a place where I can—I don't have to worry about that, so that I can focus on being a professional—and the other is you

cultivating the culture around allyship and allies. And, I think at Deloitte—I believe 2022 is the year of allyship, and the concept of allyship allowing us to be ourselves, be authentic, while still keeping that connection going with our colleagues, our family members, our friends, to all parts of our life.

So, this is kind of a personal question that I'd like to ask both of you. What does it mean to be an ally to you, and how have you, as leaders in your roles, focused on this very specific thing being an ally to your coworkers? Maybe, Tiffany, you go first, and Sarah, you go second.

Tiffany: I love this question. Maybe I was on-trend years earlier, but I always kind of considered myself an ally and would talk to people. I grew up as a third-culture kid, so that means I moved around a lot globally as a kid, and so I just have seen a lot of different people and working through different situations in their lives, so when I look at my professional life, I always take it upon myself to educate myself. That's probably the biggest piece, for me, of being an ally, is recognizing that I have my own biases—acknowledging those, making sure that if I am going to be speaking to folks that represent a certain culture, or a certain demographic, that I actually know something about that before I feign to get into a dialogue.

I personally have thought about ways over the past, probably, three to four years, of how I could increase my allyship both professionally, and even in my own community here in Atlanta, specifically for coaching and recruiting. Our CEO actually, a couple years ago, talked about the fact that in our coaching of others, we should really try to look at not necessarily coaching everyone that looks similar to yourself. So, I looked at what and who I was representing with my time and decided that I should be vesting it across a variety of different types of individuals; so I've very consciously been active in pairing myself and recognizing other individuals that could use my support and allyship.

The other area is around recruiting, so I took a vested interest in looking at our recruiting strategy here at Deloitte—as well as volunteerism—so I have been very active around working in the Atlanta community and ways that we can definitely drive some of that, whether it's intersectionality and thinking about different cohorts and where they can progress and need to be sponsored. I've really been actionable and mindful of that probably in the last two, three years. I don't know, Sarah, if any of that resonated with you?

Sarah: I will say this. She is a true and genuine ally across many dimensions, and what's so key though is—what you're hearing is—Tiffany doesn't think it's just a title. You know, oftentimes you get that "I'm self-proclaiming I'm an ally."

You have actually earned that title, and that's the guidance that we provide to anybody in our NextUp community—is that you have to earn it, you know? And you earn it by checking your own biases—like Tiffany just said—and owning them by continuing to educate yourself on behalf of marginalized or under-represented individuals, but then by advocating, and then above all, taking action.

We created a—we call it Beyond Allies. It's a journey in community that we launched two years ago, and we've had over 50 organizations and over 500 leaders go through it, and it's a journey—but it's a mindset where you then take action and advocate on behalf of others, just like what I have absolutely seen Tiffany do through the years that she and I have been able to partner together.

You know, she's tapping into her privilege, and guess what? We all have it—and don't ever be embarrassed by it—but she's tapping into her privilege and serving others with it, and so I love it.

Tiffany: And I think you have to be ready for sometimes uncomfortable conversations, too, right?

Sarah: Oh, for sure.

Tiffany: So, for yourself and you second-guess maybe what you're about to say, because—and you've got to get comfortable with that kind of ambiguity a little bit, and then also getting ready to check others. Some of the people that you're representing may not even be in the room, and you're going to have to step to the table and bring that forward.

Bobby: Well, thank you guys for sharing. I mean, I was just sort of sitting here, getting inspired, reflecting on the things that I do—and maybe don't do—as an ally. And for me, that has to start right at home with my working spouse, and how we team up, and I was sort of just thinking, hey, I'm really, really proud of her for what she does on a daily basis for her teammates, and I'm sure I can do a lot more, so this'll be sort of a reenergization—not even a word, ladies and gentlemen—

Sarah: (laughs)

Bobby: —of me down that path, so thank you for that. And I couldn't come up with a weirder segue—which is that I'd like to talk authentically—but we always have a fun question in these podcasts.

So, with that, we're going to talk authentically about something fun that happens to be today. We are recording this episode on Halloween, right? So, to do that, we're going to ask a quick Halloween question, and we're going to hear your either—and this doesn't mean you have to sing it—but I either want to know your favorite Halloween song—your spooky season song—

Sarah: (laughs)

Bobby: —or you could go a little more touching with your most cherished Halloween memory. Sarah, you get to start on this one.

Sarah: Awesome.

That Makes Cents | Season 3: Episode 9

Alright, well, I'll do both quickly. Alright, so *Rocky Horror Picture Show*—

Tiffany: Solid choice.

Sarah: Right? The whole soundtrack. My husband's a professor at University of Chicago Booth, and he always plays music before his class to, like, jazz everybody up. And he had to teach two classes, so he's going to play that. But I was just thinking about this—I was marveling that, OK—and I'm no spring chicken, not going to share my age—but I remember as a kid, growing up, we hit the ground running at 3:30, and we didn't come home till 10 o'clock, and we trick-or-treated everywhere. We went miles—and my parents had no clue where we were, right? You know? Whereas now, I've got two kids that have graduated college, you know, they've got their careers. One lives in Chicago, Madison; one's still a sophomore in college. I'm still tracking them on their phone even after they've graduated, and I thought about, like, it was a miracle we never got kidnapped, or hit by a car, or, you know? And we just came back with bags and bags and bags of candy. It's a whole different world today.

Tiffany: It really is.

Sarah: How about you, Tiffany?

Tiffany: Well, it's funny because I was getting to the house—I was behind schedule on putting up all the Halloween decorations—because usually, this is my favorite family time since I've had children. So, got them up this year, and my song—I had a Halloween playlist on there, Bobby, and I think I'm going to go with a really classic of "The Monster Mash." I've got to say, I mean, it's a solid choice. I found myself kind of doing the mash while I was putting up decorations. But then—Sarah, something you just said, I definitely want to piggyback off of. So, I remember being young, and for those tween years—let's say I was in Alberta, Calgary, and it was very, very cold—and we would dress up in whatever our costume was and then, like, eight layers of snowsuits, right?

And so, a similar type of the thing of like, go out and do the trick or treating. When I had children, I was like, "Oh, I can't wait for this to be an occasion, you know, what we do," and so for many, many years, it would be a full—we did the family kind of outfits—and my favorite one was the year that we did Wizard of Oz. I had both my parents come down. I had brothers and sisters, so nieces and nephews. We had the full kit and caboodle. I was the Wicked Witch; they chose that—I don't know if I should infer anything about it.

Sarah: (laughs)

Tiffany: There you go. But now, they—that was when they were maybe, what, three and five? You know, four and six. Now they're 13 and 10, and they're ready to do exactly what you just described, which is put on those costumes, and they're off for a couple of hours.

Sarah: Yeah. Gone.

Tiffany: I've been relegated to my porch to hand out candies to little two-year-olds that really want to get something from me, I guess. But it's a super fun time, so I'm excited for it.

Sarah: Please do.

Bobby: I don't have a favorite, but I will say this season, this year, "Somebody's Watching Me" is on repeat at my house. It's because my daughter apparently loves it. It was on one of those Halloween playlists, and so I always see her humming it, so now it gets played, because she knows how to play songs on Alexa all throughout the house, as needed.

But my favorite memory is—I guess it's almost, it's somewhat related to the topic, so we'll bring it back to that, which is my parents had the same job when I was growing up. They were both physicians, so they had the same work schedule, and my mom, though, somehow always found time every year to make our Halloween costumes, because that was what they did when she was young.

And so I remember one year, she made me a full-blown Darth Vader costume with everything. Like, she didn't buy it at the store; made the cape, made the pants, made the shirt, made the chest plate with plastic buttons put on it perfectly, and so I was this little mini Darth Vader walking around.

Tiffany: (laughs)

Bobby: I still have pictures of my little brother scared completely of me because of this perfect costume that my mom had somehow, in-between shifts in the emergency room, found time to make, so it was a fun memory of what could happen.

Tiffany: I love that. Always there, working moms. Love it.

Bobby: Absolutely.

Well, thank you both so much for joining me today, and for sharing your thoughts on the topic—showing your expertise on an important topic. For our listeners who would like to learn more about gender-centered design, you can find our full report on either [Deloitte.com](https://www.deloitte.com) or [NextUplNow.org](https://www.NextUplNow.org).

You can also connect with Sarah or Tiffany on LinkedIn, or tune into Sarah's podcast, *Advancing All Women*. She tackles the toughest subjects facing women and all our allies in the workplace, so I definitely recommend checking that one out. Again, Tiffany and Sarah, thank you so much for your time, and we will see you all on the next episode of *That Makes Cents*.

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