

S04 E05

BEHIND THE MEMBERSHIP

CAROLE COPELAND THOMAS
MULTICULTURAL SYMPOSIUM SERIES



Callie Willows: On episode five of this season, I'm talking with the wonderful Carole Copeland Thomas, a diversity and inclusion expert, all about her membership site the Multicultural Symposium Series.

Carole's online membership actually evolved from her long running annual conference with the aim of providing somewhere for a year round conversation and connection around important topics that relate to becoming a more multicultural and inclusive business. A topic that there is currently more awareness of than ever before.

In this episode then we're talking about the importance of Carole's work and the impact it's having, how she's able to keep her membership very low cost and affordable because of corporate sponsors and how she mixes her offline events and online membership and her monthly webinars that are available free to attend live, but then only available within the membership. Listen in for all this and more.

Announcer: Welcome to Behind The Membership with Callie Willows. Real people, real stories, real memberships.

Callie Willows: Today I'm joined on the show by the wonderful Carole Copeland Thomas from the Multicultural Symposium Series. Welcome to the show Carole. I'm really looking forward to talking to you and thank you for joining me.

Carole Copeland: I am really honoured to be on your show today Callie. Thank you so much. I think the world of both you and Mike and what you are doing, and thank you so much for having me on.

Callie Willows: Oh, we think the world of you too. I actually have the picture of you and I from Retain on my little memory board there as well.

Carole Copeland: Great.

Callie Willows: To get started, could you tell us a little bit about your membership, the Multicultural Symposium Series, like what it is, who it's for, what you offer, that kind of thing.

Carole Copeland: I've been in the diversity and multicultural space for 33 years. I started off as a trainer and then evolved into becoming a keynote speaker, but centrally I'm operating in that space for a number of years. About 12 years ago, I realised that many of the events and many of our activities in the DNI space around the United States and beyond were typically one off events where you would have a conference, you would have a symposium. I belong to a Collegium, which was like a think tank for some of the leading DNI experts around the country and outside of the US. So I had been a part of that. That was probably the only continuous concept of DNI work, DNI meaning Diversity and Inclusion, that I was a part of in the United States. Otherwise they were principally one off conferences conversations that were localised and the like.

So there's got to be a better way, number one of connecting people and unifying people in this space, in this arena, not just here in the United States, but also elsewhere because I really look at diversity from a global perspective and also doing it in a way where there was a continuous conversation. You're never finished with this topic, but a way where people could gather, could converse, could intellectualise, could debate, could agree to disagree in the spirit of multiculturalism thus in 2008, around the spring of 2008, I said, I'm going to start... Actually I thought about this a year before and then ultimately in 2008 in the spring, I said, "I'm going to start the Multicultural Symposium Series, MSS." And the whole purpose was to advance the cause of multiculturalism on the air face to face and online and so that was the premise of it.

I gathered together colleagues and people who I knew. I knew that I wanted to start a conference series at that time, and then ultimately dropped down to one a year. I had already started my breakfast series that had started back in 2000. So that was already going, but I wanted to pull that into this whole concept and so from there, the Multicultural Symposium Series was born in October of 2008, just at the time when the economy was crashing. So I had brought in a number of corporate sponsors and this has always been driven by corporate dollars. I have to say that and so we launched in October of 2008 with the face to face conference that had about 200 attendees. Then the economy was just going out of control. I then had to change some things, modify some things, had another conference in March of 2009, both on the campus of Bentley University, a school that I was connected with.

I had taught there part time for a number of years, had very strong relationships there. Wanted a university affiliate to be a part of MSS and so they did. So they were a part of our programme for a couple of years and then we shifted over to the

university of Massachusetts Boston campus. We were there for a number of years with our conference and then the Massachusetts College of Art and Design has been our third location in terms of conference relevance and participation. So the conference was the baseline of MSS and from that we continued these dialogues and discussions and ultimately this member only platform that finally became crystallised around 2017, 2018. That's the long version of the evolution of MSS.

Callie Willows: So it really began with that conference, which has been going for quite a while now-

Carole Copeland: Yes.

Callie Willows: ... and the other membership features kind of expanded upon that and made it more of a year round experience.

Carole Copeland: That's correct. Yes. We have had 13 conferences. The 13th, one was held in November of 2019 and then November of 2020 will be our 14th conference because of COVID, it will be a two day virtual experience. Yes.

Callie Willows: Awesome. And so the membership side of the business, what did you add into that to create that more continuous membership element?

Carole Copeland: In 2007 and 2008 when MSS started, we were at a very different point in terms of technology. I'm sure you probably know that. So the concept of a members only platform was expensive and more complicated. So I created more of a very elementary level membership site with a general members only password that was applicable for everybody for the entire site with the platform that I was using and so it served the purpose okay. It was fine. I always wanted to do more. I wanted to really have more of a dedicated members only website and so finally, around 2017, 2018, I was able to do that. I use a Weebly platform, so I'm not a WordPress person and so I have other websites for my business purposes. So I contained it within the confines of that website. It's functioned well, and I don't really have any complaints per se. It obviously there's some more things I could have done.

So yes, now I have a dedicated website for members for the... It's called the mssglobalsummit.com. That's the actual web address, but it's a members only website for the Multicultural Symposium Series. A couple of pages are free including the join me page. That's obviously free. What I've done now is the strength of it tends to be the conference and our monthly webinars series. So we have that and the way I've constructed it now is that that webinar is free for anyone to participate with initially. We just had one last week talking about the future of the travel and tourism industry. So we had a number of people who participated live. I have decided now because of COVID, I'll provide and allow people to view that web... That programme, that webinar for the rest of July and then it will be gated for members.

So I'm giving people an extra period of time to watch it and I've gotten some requests also from folks in the industry who want to see it. So they'll have a chance to view it and watch it and then it will be... The webpage will be closed off for members only and then obviously we will have a July programme at the end of the

month, August, et cetera. These webinars are held at the end of the month. So we've had a number of different topics that we've covered. Some with our actual members.

Callie Willows: Awesome. And so you mentioned that you're extending how long that webinars available for free now, how long are they normally available for before they go into the membership?

Carole Copeland: Typically they're just for the people who are on the programme itself. On the webinar itself. So they have a chance to... The general public can come and be a part of it live, and then it immediately gets gated off to the members only section.

Callie Willows: Okay, awesome. And so I wanted to ask you a little bit about your typical members. So the topic is diversity and inclusion. So is it typically companies and corporates that are joining, who are looking to expand their knowledge for their business teams or is it small businesses? What kind of members are you attracting?

Carole Copeland: It's an interesting... That's a good question Callie and I've looked at that in terms of I struggle, always who's my avatar, you know?

Callie Willows: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Carole Copeland: Who do I go after? Typically it's a business professional. It's someone who is a manager, a leader, an advocate, a community advocate, typically in some kind of leadership or influential role who needs to gather more information about this topic. Needs to be connected to other people within this space so that they can be better influencers, better leaders as a result of it. That is probably my quote avatar. Yes, it includes HR. I have to deal quite extensively with human resources, but it's not exclusive to them. So I will have executive directors. I will have other corporate leaders who will be a part of it. I'll have individuals maybe who have recently retired from a role in a company or an organisation who wants to stay current or relevant in this topic and they'll be a part of it.

What I'm doing now is because of the series of events that have taken place in the United States including the execution of George Floyd in Minneapolis, I am specifically targeting CEOs because I feel CEOs have a responsibility and a duty to educate themselves on the topic of diversity and inclusion and multiculturalism, so that they can better represent themselves both in their company and out of their company and so that is my most recent target audience. I'm doing a number of things to attract them and some of them are now calling me for help because of what's taking place here. So that is, I sort of graduated to that level. I started off with middle managers, HR individuals, and now just because of the circumstances that we're in, I have to really target the CEOs.

Callie Willows: Yeah. And it definitely seems even here in the UK that this is much more of a prominent topic in people's minds these days as well. So I'd imagine that obviously, whilst you don't necessarily want to capitalise on what's happening at the moment, you've got those resources, you've got that expertise and that membership there,

so actually the fact that you can reach out to CEOs and you already have this information that people are looking for right now is a great thing, I think.

Carole Copeland: Yeah. And they're... You know, there are lots of ways to approach it. You're correct Callie in saying it's not a ma... I don't want to merchandise what's happening, but I had begun Zoom tutorial programmes in April because of the economy and because I thought DNI was going to be somewhat of a dormant topic at that time. The zoom tutorials took off. So I'm very busy in that area and people know that I've been in the DNI space for a long time. So when this happened on Memorial day here in the United States with George Floyd and things started blowing up, then my phone started blowing up.

So it is an interesting combination of the skill sets that I'm using in the technology arena. I've been using Zoom for almost five years. I have the equipment. For a number of reasons I've been doing online coaching for a number of years. So that was a natural space for me to walk into, but then when this happened and what I'm seeing taking place and with the phone ringing, people... I mean and dealing with inquiries all the time now, it is also time... I have a duty to come into this space and to speak truth because there's some things I'm very critical of even in the DNI space that relate to my members and relate to the botched job that we've done for decades with this topic. So the membership site now is more important than ever because of the times that we're living in.

Callie Willows: And when it comes to the membership and how you're essentially selling that to people, are you selling it on the basis of the membership itself, so in terms of the webinars and community and things like that or is it still predominantly the conference that people are joining for and the other membership features are essentially a bonus to that?

Carole Copeland: I'm approaching it both ways. Year round I am identifying and working with sponsors because the sponsorship revenue source and my training and speaking revenue source are my principle vehicles for revenue in my company. The membership site, I look at long term as building it up to well over a thousand plus members. I'm at 200 members right now, building it up to well over a thousand plus members and that being a principal revenue source and it would provide me with an independent revenue source also. So that is the long term goal that I have with the MSS Global Summit. So my approach is two-fold.

Number one, constantly building relationships with organisational leaders, corporate members. I'm actually looking for an answer from one of my potential sponsors that would be returning at a significantly larger level right now, and then some other organisations I'm going after and with those sponsorship dollars comes X number of memberships. So they would automatically get memberships into MSS, but there is also the individual member who I'm also going after. I typically begin to target them now in the summer in July through the November time period, because it leads up to and builds up to my conference. I now have put in place a yearly annual automatic renewal process. So I have that. I typically... I've tried Callie, I've tried the month to month membership piece and in my space it doesn't

work. At least for me, it doesn't work. My individual membership amount is rather low. It's only \$99 a year. So that's-

Callie Willows: Oh, wow.

Carole Copeland: ... pretty low because again, I want to... I'm interested in scaling. So I am ultimately interested in a larger volume of individuals who can afford to routinely be a part of my experience and so that's why I've thought long and hard about pricing and that price rings a bell and it's affordable for many people. I'm glad I have it low because of the economy that we're in and I'm pretty assured that I will have people who will return even though our economy is in such a precarious state. So my approach has been two-fold. It's always been toward the corporate element because I'm in that space a lot, but also for the individual who is interested in this, who is committed to this and I have a number of my members who are in that space and the investment makes sense for them.

Callie Willows: Awesome. And so a couple of questions on that. The first one is the \$99 per year, as you say, that's very low. Is that just for the membership? Does that include the conference or is the conference then an additional fee on top of that?

Carole Copeland: It includes the conference.

Callie Willows: Oh wow.

Carole Copeland: So it includes the webinars, online activity that I currently have with the membership site and it includes the conference and again, I can do that because I'm supplemented by the corporate sponsorship piece. I couldn't do that if it were a standalone, but because I approach it that way it works out for me, right. I have tried higher price points. I've had price points in the \$200 range. They tend to be companies that would come in at that level and so I've experimented and as of last year landed on the solid \$99 rate, even though I've had higher price points.

Callie Willows: And I think... You know, as you said, it is a low price point, but it makes it a no brainer price for people that are interested in this topic and who want to do the work to kind of improve their company and things where if they're not a bigger company, the pricing might be an issue. So actually, I think that's a good strategy because you've got that corporate sponsorship which a lot of memberships won't have and actually, I think that's a great kind of model for you having both of those revenues.

Carole Copeland: Yeah. And you know, and I really, really... My goal has always been the stretch beyond the US. I really want international. I have a couple of people from Canada who are my members and one or two people in other countries, but I really want to expand and to me I look at the... I've always seen this as a global marketplace, a global community and so for that reason, I wanted to keep the price low so that it would not be a hindrance for people in other countries to join.

Callie Willows: Yeah. And that was actually going to be my other question, was it an international audience that you have or is it mainly U S centric? So.

Carole Copeland: Yeah. No. It's international. I've had international speakers. I've brought speakers in from the UK to my conference, from India to my conference and you know, we certainly use Zoom for various purposes. So I look at this topic internationally.

Callie Willows: Awesome. So what would you say has been your biggest challenge with the membership over the years then?

Carole Copeland: Scaling at this point. Finding enough time to really scale this business and to bring people on board who understand its important. I don't think it's going to be a problem now because of what we're facing. I think now is the time for me to really pounce and what I'm going to do quite aggressively because we have this virtual conference coming up. So I'm going to take advantage of that to really scale my membership and probably the community forum. I have had... It's like crickets with my community forum, where people who are participating with the webinar series and they want to be a part of the membership, but I have not had much luck with really an active community forum. Now this is a forum where I'm paying a service to have this forum housed in my membership site.

So it's not a Facebook forum. I do have an MSS free group that I have had for many years and it's quiet. It's pretty quiet. About 150 members or whatever. I have a very active Facebook page, so I've well over 5,000 members there, I have a very active LinkedIn page, 7,000 members. So my Facebook and LinkedIn presence probably participate with my image as a diversity professional and so I use those platforms also, but I would like to transfer some of that and would like to have a healthy engagement within the membership site and the community forum. That's what I would like to work on.

Callie Willows: Do you think some of that... With your engagement in the forum, do you think some of that is purely who your members are? So if it is more company CEOs, executives, directors, maybe that community element, they've not necessarily got the time to spend in a community and actually the fact that they're turning up for the webinars and things is great because that's where they're getting the education. So it's not necessarily going to have that hundreds of posts a day kind of community just based on the kind of people that are members I would imagine.

Carole Copeland: I think you're right. I do. Just because of... They're very busy people, but they have a stake in the game. So you're correct that they show up at times when it's important for them and the webinars are the vehicles of choice that they use. I think that you're right. One thing I have not started yet, and I want to start, again, this is a great time to start, are my online courses. So I think that that will drive more people to the site when I establish those this year. I'm going to do that in the next, let's say month or two. A number of courses dealing with unconscious bias, just basic diversity sessions, may have a couple of Zoom sessions in there as well. How to use Zoom for your purposes when you're having your diversity dialogues. So I believe that once those courses get established and you have to be a member in order to participate with them, that will also spill over into more conversation with the community forum.

Callie Willows: Yes definitely.

Carole Copeland: And again, I've learned so, so much from Membership Guys and from the Academy. As a member of the Academy just the plethora of courses that you offer, the way that you have them laid out, I'm using them as models as I'm setting up my own courses.

Callie Willows: Yeah. Great. And so if those are the challenges you've had, what would you say has been the highlight or your favourite thing about having the membership?

Carole Copeland: Just the membership and in general, when I meet people or see people who will quote me verbatim. Will say, you know I sat through your training session or I listened to your webinar and you said, so and so, or I learned XYZ. You know my heart warms when people who I haven't seen, and maybe they're not part of my membership academy of MSS, but maybe they've been a part of my audience in past years and this has happened to me more than once and five, six, seven, 10 years and they will say, you said so-and-so in 1999, and I've never forgotten it. You know it stuns me that people would have that kind of memory and would have that kind of value in the conversations that I've been a part of. The work that I do is pioneer work. Many times it's thankless work.

I've tried to run away from it as I've mentioned to you with the onset of the Corona virus, I said, "Oh, okay, I'll go off and go into this area now and deal with technology and Zoom." And then it just comes roaring back to me. So this is the space that I'm supposed to be in knowing that it's hard and it's difficult and now is the time for me in this case with the CEOs to hold them accountable and to say, you need to do this because you said this in these glowing letters that you've put out, but I know what's going on in your company and what you're doing in your company is crap. Your people tell me that. So, yeah. The membership platform provides more of an in depth opportunity for people to feel safe about exploring this topic and also looking at ways that they can navigate the tough choppy waters within their organisations. Yeah.

Callie Willows: And it's one of those topics as well, where you almost have to appreciate delayed gratification because you're having a huge impact, but that impact isn't something that's immediately going to be seen, or it's not something where somebody gets an immediate result that they can then come and say to you. Here's this awesome thing that we've done as a result of you. So you're having a huge impact and you're having an impact probably a lot beyond what you see and you know, because obviously if you impact the companies, you're going to impact the employees and have a much wider reaction in the world as well. So yeah, you've definitely got that odd topic where there's a huge impact to that, but you're not necessarily going to see immediate results or get those huge wins from your members like with a lot of other topics.

Carole Copeland: Exactly. Now that you've used... Very elegantly said exactly what has happened. It is I say pioneering, you say delayed, and we're saying pretty much the same thing. It is a topic that if you want to make a difference, you've got to push hard. It's uncomfortable, but that's the only way to make a difference. If you're really looking at a cross cultural respect across lines of ethnicity and race and other topics. Knowing the history certainly in the United States, it's one that, yeah, you have to

push and work toward it. You're recording this I know that this is an audio podcast, but we're looking at my virtual background. I have an American flag back here because it was the 4th of July and black lives matter because of the importance of this topic now that was assemble back when Trayvon Martin was killed a few years ago, but now it's become a rallying cry within the United States because black lives matter and some people will say, well, all lives matter or blue lives matter for the police department and I'm going to pull up... See if I can very quickly pull up something that will explain this.

It's not a matter of that. It's a matter of understanding the seriousness of what's happening within the black community here in the United States and how we are being subjected to all kinds of horrific things that are killing us. So there was a little girl who was protesting a couple of weeks ago, and she had a poster board and she said, "We said, black lives matter. Never said only black lives matter. We know all lives matter. We just need your help with black lives matter because black lives are in danger." And that's exactly what is taking place. The killings by police, by police vigilantes, by other individuals who have this deep seated hatred of my people. I go back seven, six generations in this country.

My roots are traceable back to the mid to late 1700s. I have a very active family reunion, and we've done a lot of archival tracing. We know the plantations where my family comes from and what has happened since that time. So you know I'm a very proud African American and my roots go back a long time. So when I hear the hatred and I see the things that are taking place, it hurts my heart. It hurts all of us and we want to get to the point where we can be very real and transparent about our situation at hand with the history of slavery, which is very much a part of our conversation today and how we can take that information and pave out and stake out a way where we can from a cross cultural perspective live together in a respectful manner, in a manner where everybody is respected, including those in the African American community.

Callie Willows: Yeah, definitely. And I think more than ever, this seems to be prominent not just in America but around the world. You know, we've had smaller movements like this before over the years because this isn't a new problem. It's not a new problem at all. I think it's just become that breaking point for a lot of people and understandably so, and that's had ripples outside of America. You know, we've had protests here in the UK where you know, don't get me wrong racism is alive and well in the UK as well, but it's a very different system to in the US I would say as well but yeah, I think the fact that this is happening all around the world. Now it's a much bigger issue and people seem to be ready to actually adopt change and fight for change as well, which-

Carole Copeland: Exactly.

Callie Willows: ... is the important thing.

Carole Copeland: Yeah. I mean, I look at... I was watching the protest in Bristol and the statue that was... The metal statue of a slave gentlemen who was involved in the slave trade back in the, I guess the 1700s, where his whole metal statue was ripped up and

then rolled and thrown into the river and you know that was just a reminder that, yeah we're all feeling some kind of pain. The pain that is dismal with all of us. I remember 30 years ago Callie, when I was working in Australia and speaking over there and I wanted to go to the Aboriginal community in the Redfern area of Sydney and so I asked somebody how to get there, took a bus or a cab over there, just showed up in one of their health centres and was welcomed with open arms and learned about their plight and how they had so much respect for our civil rights movement in the United States, but they deeply connected with the indigenous people in the US.

We call them indigenous people, the native Americans who were here and that was a reminder of 30 plus years ago about the connection that people have to each other whether you're in Australia, whether you're in Kenya, where I go, whether you're in England, new castle or in the case of Belgium where they took Leopold's the second statue down, he was horrible. Talk about a horrible, horrible leader. What he did to the people of the Congo in Africa back in the 1800s is central. He just central and so yeah, people all these years later are reacting to the sins that were done back in the 1800s and the 1700s, whether you're in Belgium or whether you're in the UK.

Callie Willows: Yeah, definitely. So I want to switch gears a little bit now, and let's talk about life as a membership site owner. So do you have a team helping you with the membership and the conference and things, or is it mainly you?

Carole Copeland: It's mainly me and that's by choice. I've had with my business activities staff in the past. A small staff, but by choice because of technology and because of the virtual arrangements that can be had, I have taken advantage of that in terms of virtual assistants. I have with my conference series, a team of volunteers ready at the moment with my face to face conferences and my breakfast series. I've had 27 breakfasts I believe and 13 conferences and so I have a core team of people here in the greater Boston area who support and help me with my activities.

So with that, with outsourcing, when I need to I'm in pretty good shape in terms of what I do. My daughter and son-in-law live here with me in my home. I have another daughter and son-in-law who live elsewhere with my grandchildren, who I haven't seen in several months because of this COVID, but my daughter helps out quite a bit. So she is very supportive of what I do and assists me in what I do. So I manage pretty well and it's primarily because of technology.

Callie Willows: Awesome. And so what would you say are actually your main priority or tasks on a day to day basis then? Do you have a fixed routine or is it various depending on what you're working on?

Carole Copeland: Ooh, that's a great question. It varies, but now again because of where we are, it's interesting I'm very busy in a different kind of way now than I was prior to COVID. Typically without COVID, I'd be out somewhere or I would be online. There would be this combination of face to face activities, meetings, events that I would be putting on, et cetera, and the online presence. Now everything is online, but it means that I have to schedule my time well in advance. I have the free tutorials that

I continue to run with Zoom and because they're popular and people all over the country will participate. I have client activities now that I'm running, because of the race situation here and companies wanting to really get the information and work with me in terms of structuring forums. I'm running a forum tomorrow for a company, I'm running a conference next week for a company.

So I'm very busy with those kinds of activities and then I have been introduced and invited to participate now with five, almost six, but five virtual town halls. Three dealing with the direct aftermath of George Floyd's death. So I've worked with colleagues and people I know in Minneapolis, Minnesota. We've now had three virtual town halls that have been actually hosted by a church there, St. Peter's African Methodist Episcopal church. That's also my denomination, African Methodist Episcopal that goes back to 1787, connected with the Methodist Episcopal church. We're an outgrowth of that and so our sister church in Minneapolis hosted now three town halls that have been seen by several thousand people and so we had leading experts in Minneapolis talking about the aftermath. We've had legislators as well. I moderated them and helped to co-produce them. Done the same thing for an organisation here in Boston called New Democracy Coalition headed by the executive director who is Kevin Peterson.

I should say that Reverend John Robinson is the pastor of St. Peter's AME church in Minneapolis. William Wells, Bill Wells is a member and also the former chair of the National Black MBA association of which I'm a part. So that's been my Minneapolis town hall experience. Here Kevin Peterson and Jeff Durham who runs the boards on behind the scenes have had three again, successful town halls talking about similar matters. COVID the impact of the black community. So all this is sort of interrelated and now have been seen by more than 10, 15,000 people or so. So they've been successfully run through Zoom and then stream live to Facebook. So that has been... Those have been other activities for me and then there have been television programmes. I've been interviewed by the news and, by you and others.

So I'm busy with interconnected work that definitely deals with the membership site, deals with my webinars series and obviously now the ramp up of my two day conference it's being held and so what I do, people will say, gosh, you're busy all the time. well yes I'm busy, but it's all related to each other. So I may speak to my client tomorrow, the May Institute, they have 3000 employees and they have been a supporter of my business for many years, and some of their members are my members of the Multicultural Symposium Series. So that kind of connection takes place, but then I may work with an organisation that has no connection to me at all and so I build up a relationship with them. So it is related work, relatable work that impacts indirectly or directly the membership site.

Callie Willows: Yeah. And I think even if you're not directly say promoting the membership for want of a better word at these events and things, it raises awareness of you and your authority and things like that, which in the long run all comes back to you, the membership essentially as well.

Carole Copeland: Exactly.

Callie Willows: So yeah, when you say it's interconnected whilst they may not be activities that are directly working on the membership, it does all connect and cause that reaction as well in the long term.

Carole Copeland: Exactly.

Callie Willows: So overall then, what impact would you say having the membership has had for your life and business so far?

Carole Copeland: Oh, it's been a tremendous impact and one I'm very happy to have because it's provided a home for people to come who want to talk about these topics of multiculturalism diversity and inclusion. Again, my goal strategically has always been this continuous conversation and discussion point. Yes, I envisioned my membership site to be much larger with a larger base of members. I'm going to achieve that this year for obvious reasons because of the circumstances that we find ourselves in and I think because the conference is going to be virtual, that provides an opportunity for people around the world.

I'll make a point to have speakers from outside of the US to participate so that we can really put together a strong programme and a platform that will be attractive for people to come and to be a part of and they'll want to stay as well. So I'm excited about that. I really am. I know that it's going to take work and effort, but I think the basis there, I know that my brand and my reputation is strong, which is a good point. I've always protected that and want to continue to protect that, but now it's a matter of helping people to understand the value of the Multicultural Symposium Series and why they're needed and why it's a great place for them to hang out and be a part of.

Callie Willows: I think that virtual conference as well, whilst it's not necessarily what you would have wanted to do, and it's kind of being forced, but you were mentioning earlier about wanting to attract that more international audience as well and actually having that virtual conference this year, doesn't open that up to a huge amount more people than previous years as well.

Carole Copeland: Exactly.

Callie Willows: So yeah, whilst it might not have been what you planned at the start of the year, I think there's actually a lot of positives for you in the approach as well.

Carole Copeland: So true. So true. Yes.

Callie Willows: So is there anything if you were starting the membership again, that you would do differently or anything that you wish you'd known earlier?

Carole Copeland: That's a great question. I thought about that and I would say that I probably would have blogged more, blogged more consistently, provided more content and certainly gotten the online courses up and running earlier. Although I have to say that now is probably the time to do it so earlier may have been another... Maybe a year back or so, but definitely the writing because I mean, writing is so powerful

and it can be repurposed in so many different ways and I have other sites that sort of feed into the member's site.

So my blogging goes to my main site, carolecopelandthomas.com and then a sister site to the membership site is mssconnect.com. So those are the places where the blogging takes place and I would say, would love to have had those ramped up more plentiful in terms of content, but that's me speaking and you know, when people visit my site, I'm actually revising my main site right now with the help of a wonderful young woman Arianna Cooper... Coleman is her name, Arianna Coleman and she's based in Tokyo.

She's an African American married to a German based in Tokyo, but she's a marketing expert and so we're working together, she's working with me just to repurpose and redesign principally the front half of my website, which will go live soon and so that's exciting but... And so listening to her I have a lot of respect for Arianna and others. You know, they say, Oh, you got a lot of content on here. So maybe it's just me thinking about, I want more and more and more and not realising for some people that's enough.

Callie Willows: Yeah, definitely. And so actually I'd love to just know with the membership as it is currently, if somebody joins as a member. So you've mentioned the monthly webinars, do you get kind of essentially a library of those previous webinars? Do you also get the previous conference content? What does somebody actually get when they join?

Carole Copeland: Absolutely. That's a great question. Yeah. You get access to the entire website, which includes past conferences. There are... The whole video programmes on with our past conferences, the photo galleries, hundreds of photos with our previous conferences and also all of the webinars that are available. All of those would be available to someone who has access as a member. Right.

Callie Willows: Awesome. And so if... With you mentioning about doing online courses in the future, would they be part of the membership or is that something you're looking to do separately or a combination?

Carole Copeland: Oh I've learned from you guys. No, it will be part of the membership. Oh yeah, definitely. So again, high value for a very affordable price. Again, the whole purpose of that is to attract a much larger audience. So yeah, the online courses will definitely be part of the membership package.

Callie Willows: Awesome. And so my last question then, and you've sort of already mentioned this I think as we've gone along, but I'd love to know what your goals are for the Multicultural Symposium Series. What does the membership look like for you in a year's time per se?

Carole Copeland: At least a thousand members initially. A place where people can go and they can get truthful factual information, not a lot of puffs. Credible courses, content. The one thing I should mention Callie is that the writing I have done, I'm pretty meticulous about what I say and how I say things, because I know how people read

what I say. I mean, they literally read what I say and they'll call me out if something is inaccurate. So I have a tendency to provide a lot of background information, maybe some historical information or references, not from an academic perspective, but just information that can be used and passed on. So you know, that's something I want to do more of, and I want this site to be almost like a university where you come and you can meet different people and you can take courses and you can learn and you can exchange information and you can... And talk and find and realise that, you know what you're saying, your voice matters and other people's voices matter and you can learn from a perspective that maybe you hadn't thought of before.

The US has 5% of the world's population, just 5%. Yet our resources, what we demand and claim are much, much larger than 5%. Unfortunately Americans don't really know that much about other cultures. They're certainly not history buffs in large part. I'm using generic terms and so I look at my site as an opportunity from an American point of view, to help teach Americans about what they don't know about themselves and what they don't know about other cultures outside of the US and then I also look at people outside of the US coming to mssglobalsummit.com and learning not just about the American perspectives, but perspectives that they may not have considered elsewhere.

So a good part I'm really looking forward to getting back on the road and travelling again. I love to travel because that feeds my content with my website, with the Multicultural Symposium Series. So that's going to be very important from 2021, 2022 going forward and I certainly have enough information and content now to ramp up and to beef up, but I really see this as being a content rich marketplace for people to come feeling that they are at a credible place and a place where they can get great information, but then sharing that information with other people as a result of being members.

Callie Willows: Awesome. That sounds great and yeah, I'm really looking forward to seeing how this does expand and grow for you over the next year, two years, because I think, yeah, it's definitely the time for this to really take off I think for you and for that change to really start becoming more commonplace.

Carole Copeland: And I can't thank you and Mike enough again for starting The Membership Guys. You know, your free site and your academy. I'm not just flattering you, but I'm telling you something that I really feel. I mean, you've done... What I like about the information that you have there is that it is substantial and not gimmicky and your approach is substantial. I was at your conference last year Retain, which I loved. I signed up early and I was so excited about being there and I was amazed because you didn't spend one minute selling us anything. It was all about the content and the information. Not one minute.

You gave away your book, which I just picked up yesterday. So... And just your approach with how you're looking at membership sites and how you're guiding us and giving us information, I think is an appropriate way to go. As I mentioned earlier, certainly here in the US there's a lot of crap out there. There's a lot of crap in my industry, in other industries. There are very slick salespeople out there that

can lead you astray, or you can give up a lot of money and I'm very respectful and thankful that you're not in that space.

Callie Willows: Well, thank you. That really means a lot to hear and yeah, we love having you as a member and it was awesome to see you at Retain last year and get to spend some time with you as well. So yeah, we really appreciate that. Thank you and so if somebody wants to find out more about you see a little bit more of your information and things like that, where's the best place for them to do that?

Carole Copeland: The membership site where you could go again, a couple of pages are free and you can learn about us is mssglobalsummit.com. It's mssglobalsummit.com. My website is [carole](http://carole.com), and that's Carole with an E, copelandthomas.com and then a companion site is mssconnect.com. So three different sites, sort of interrelated.

Callie Willows: Awesome I'll put the links to all of those below the interview as well to make it really easy for people too and so, yeah, all I want to say is just thank you so much for joining me today Carole. It's been great talking with you, lots of great information there and as I said before, I'm really looking forward to watching your membership continue to grow. Thank you.

Carole Copeland: Thank you so much Callie.

Callie Willows: That's all for another episode folks. Thank you for listening and thank you again to Carole for sharing her experience. If you'd like to see more of Carole's work or to join her membership if you're looking to improve your own company's diversity then head to mssglobalsummit.com or head to the membershipguys.com/btm37 to find the links to Carole's various different sites, as well as to pick up the transcript and show notes for this episode.

One of the things I particularly love about Carole is how she is always looking for new ways to support her audience and bring value, especially in the current climate. So while she is busier than ever right now, she's still looking at how she can make her membership better and more valuable with the addition of new features like courses.

What did you find interesting about this episode? Let me know your takeaways over at talkmemberships.com and I'll see you again next week for another episode of Behind The Membership.