The HR L&D Podcast: World Hearing Day with Nicole Behne #79 -Transcript

[00:00:00] **Nicole Behne:** In the world, there are 1.5 billion people that have some degree of hearing loss. In the United States alone, there are 48 million people that have hearing loss with that. They're not all old and retired. 60% of them are in the workforce or in education. And we have to be talking about this today because our workforce of tomorrow is changing.

[00:00:24] **Nick Day:** Welcome to The HR L&D Podcast where we explore cutting edge HR trends and best practices with top leaders who are shaping the future of work. My name's Nick Day and I'm founder of JGA Recruitment Group specialist HR search firm. I'm also a qualified executive coach. And a recognized HR thought leader listed on Thinkers 360.

[00:00:46] **Nick Day:** Together we are gonna dive into topics from diversity and inclusion to technology, learning, curation, and employee experience to help you evolve your people and your development strategies. So, whether you are flourishing HR executive, a rising manager, or a seasoned CHRO who's driving transformation, this podcast is for you.

[00:01:06] **Nick Day:** So, grab your coffee and let's play.

[00:01:11] **Nick Day:** Hello, and welcome to today's episode of The HR L&D Podcast. My name is Nick Day. I'm CEO of JGA Recruitment Group, specialist HR recruiters, and today I have a special guest, Nicole Behne. Now she is someone who creates workplace solutions for people who are hard of hearing what's known as h o h.

[00:01:31] **Nick Day:** Her work transforms an invisible challenge that's negatively impacting. 12% of America's workforce into environments where employees are more engaged, included, and productive. Now, studies have proven that hearing loss can often cause reduced productivity due to depression, social isolation, and listening fatigue.

[00:01:51] **Nick Day:** Now as a Fortune 300 marketing executive with a significant. Hearing loss in her life. Nicole has learned how to adapt to these challenging situations in many workplace environments. From boardrooms to manufacturing floors. Nicole has learned how to utilize technology, spatial awareness, and education to help her peer group achieve best practices when engaging employees who are hard of hearing.

[00:02:13] **Nick Day:** She's incredibly passionate about advocating for and providing practical solutions to business professionals with a hearing loss disability. And each space and each situation presents a unique opportunity for Nicole to find efficient and effective ways to navigate the hurdles that affect individuals with hearing loss.

[00:02:30] **Nick Day:** And that's what we're gonna be focusing today's episode of the show on, because it is World Hearing Day coming up on the 3rd of March, and Nicole is leading the charge to make sure that. Is heard. She's recently launched Hearing Inclusion to help d e i, leaders and HR teams to conduct environmental assessments, develop customized plans of action and produce individualized coaching programs.

[00:02:55] **Nick Day:** We're gonna find out all about all of those things going on due, uh, during today's show. So, it just leads me to say, welcome Nicole to The HR L&D Podcast.

[00:03:04] **Nicole Behne:** Nick, thanks so much for having me. Thanks for that great introduction. I am so thrilled to be here and share my story and hearing inclusion's journey today.

[00:03:12] **Nick Day:** You and me both. You and me both. I'm gonna start with the first question, which actually is not about hearing loss necessarily, but it absolutely impacts the world of HR. And we're gonna be talking about inclusion today, but what do the words human resources, mean to you?

[00:03:25] **Nicole Behne:** I think that's a great question to start with.

[00:03:26] **Nicole Behne:** And Human Resources really focuses on the company's most important assets, the people. Right. And when you look at hr, I love to think about how much that has evolved even over the last 10 years. We, we weren't really talking that much about DE&I 10 years ago, but we are today. And, and it's all about trying to find and hone in on the things that the human resource department can do to make sure that all of the employees are successful at work.

[00:03:55] **Nicole Behne:** And today we're talking about something that, um, is an invisible disability in the workforce and that awareness can make people more successful at work.

[00:04:03] **Nick Day:** Fantastic. Well, a great way to start the show. I'm gonna ask what, Mike appears to be a little bit of a strange question. Um, but I know there are varying degrees of, of hearing loss.

[00:04:12] **Nick Day:** I wondered if perhaps you could help our audience understand, what does hearing loss sound like? And I know that might sound like a strange question, but it's the first thing that came to mind for me and I was like, what does it sound like? Well, what are we dealing with here?

[00:04:24] **Nicole Behne:** Absolutely. We can start with that.

[00:04:26] **Nicole Behne:** So I'm gonna take you through a bit of a biology lesson first to get to like what hearing loss sound like. So when you think about hearing loss, it all starts with your ears, right? And there are three parts to your ears. You have the outer ear, which actually like collects the sound and brings it in. It brings it into the middle.

[00:04:43] **Nicole Behne:** And that middle ear uses sound vibrations to transfer the sound along some bones in there, into your inner ear. And in the inner ear you have, um, really this sound transmitter, if you will, and the cochlea lives in that inner ear. And on the cochlea, there's all these hair-like structures that then take the sound and transmit it to the neurotransmitters in your brain so you can.

[00:05:08] **Nicole Behne:** Now on the cochlea, there are, um, three parts. There's a part that hears high frequency, um, middle frequency and low frequency sounds with that transmission. And when you have a hearing loss, there's multiple things that can happen. Um, for me, for example, I've lost low frequency hearing. So in my cochlea, that low frequency transmitter, it just doesn't work anymore.

[00:05:32] **Nicole Behne:** So I don't hear, um, men's voices, low tones, computer tones, um, even my car running. Nick, I can't tell you how many times I pulled into work and thought I pushed the button to turn my car off and got inside to only have a co-worker come in and ask why my car was still running outside. So, I have now learned to look at the tachometer to make sure it's at zero when I get out of my car, because that's just one example of what hearing loss sounds like to me.

[00:05:59] **Nicole Behne:** Now, reverse scope, hearing what I have only accounts for about 10% of the hearing loss that's out there today. The other 90% have lost high frequency hearing. And when you lose high frequency hearing, you're not hearing women's voices, kids birds chirping, um, telephones. Those are just examples of that high frequency hearing loss and with hearing loss.

[00:06:23] **Nicole Behne:** You know, it's the, one of the disclaimers I have to say here is that they're all different, right? Um, people could lose something in the inner ear, middle ear, or outer ear, and those sounds are all different and they lose sounds everywhere from being able to hear a whisper to sirens and fire trucks and, and thunder, things like that.

[00:06:43] **Nicole Behne:** So everyone's availability of what they hear is different depending on, on where they're at with their hearing.

[00:06:51] **Nick Day:** Fantastic. Wow. It's a really, really good whistle stop tour about hearing and, and I didn't know about that. I didn't realize there was, there were both types or, or you know, I'm certainly in the learning cave at the moment and that's for sure.

[00:07:00] **Nick Day:** And something actually which came to light just from you, you know, as we met each other recently, is I didn't know there was a world hearing day and that's, I felt gutted not to know that because I liked to pride myself on, on, on being, you know, aware of these things myself. I wasn't aware and I, so I wanna, I guess, ask you the question.

[00:07:17] **Nick Day:** Why are we talking about hearing inclusion now? Why haven't we been talking about it, about it before? Why are these days not more publicized? You mentioned, or I mentioned introduction, 12%, um, of the American population, workforce you are suffering with, with some degree of hearing loss. So, you know, what do we need to do to make it a more relevant topic and to bring this into public consciousness.

[00:07:38] **Nicole Behne:** That's a great question and I do applaud the World Health Organization for, um, celebrating or campaigning around World Hearing Day. This has actually been around since 2007 and um, this campaign is focused on. Prevention of hearing loss and improved hearing care by really focused, pushing activities across the globe.

[00:08:00] **Nicole Behne:** And there's a, an event that's hosted at the World Health Organization on March 3rd as well. This year's theme around World Hearing Day is ear and hearing care for all. Let's make it a reality. So, they are trying to, um, to really focus on hearing care. Prevention of hearing loss. But when I look at that and we think about hearing care for all, I think about the listeners of this podcast that are involved with human resources, and I really question, are we doing what we need to be doing in the workforce to make sure our employees have proper hearing care?

[00:08:39] **Nicole Behne:** And that can really. Thinking through like, does your insurance com, your insurance, um, policy cover hearing aids, because for many years where I worked, it didn't, right? Yeah. It covered glasses, but it didn't cover hearing aids. And I'm like, wait, wait, wait. It's okay to, to, to be able to not be able to see what I can't hear and work.

[00:08:57] **Nicole Behne:** So, I always thought that that was not fair from, uh, some, from a perspective of someone who has hearing loss. And when we think about, um, even. Hearing care for all. I think we also have to flip that and talk about what do we have available in our workspaces from, um, where people work in their cubes and the meeting technology available in meeting rooms today to make sure that everyone can bring their most authentic and true self to those meetings

[00:09:24] **Nick Day:** and be able to hear.

[00:09:25] **Nick Day:** Yeah, I mean, I've got newer ones following at the minute of things that I'm not doing enough of. One is being, you know, I think I mentioned off air here that we don't currently provide a transcript of this show. It just hadn't occurred to me. I was looking at it from a technical point of view and not really considering the impact of not doing that.

[00:09:40] **Nick Day:** That's gonna be one of the steps that I'm gonna take. Host this show to start making transcripts available off for our audience. But you made another great case there talking about, um, eyecare. And we, you know, in our own business here, we provide free eyecare and we provide free eye tests. Um, I don't know about the, whether we deal or don't in our current handbook provide, um, hearing tests, but we certainly should.

[00:09:58] **Nick Day:** And I think these are things that, you know, insight leads to action. I'm a big believer in that and we're raising awareness now, and if these new ones are firing for me about the things we are not doing, hopefully it's gonna be fine for the HR listeners, uh, for this show as well. One thing I'd be really interested to know, uh, Nicole, in your experience you've worked on in boardrooms, in manufacturing floors, I mentioned in introduction there, what's it like to navigate a typical day, um, in your work life as someone who does, uh, have, have hearing loss, and does it differ significantly from someone who does have normal hearing?

[00:10:29] **Nick Day:** Absolutely it

[00:10:30] **Nicole Behne:** does. You know, I've, I recently thought like having hearing loss, Nick described as doing crossword puzzles, Suko and Scrabble, playing that game all at the same time. So, when you have a hearing loss, you're constantly filling in the blanks of what. You hear and what you don't hear. So yes, you're missing things in meetings all the time and inferring, trying to infer what you heard.

[00:10:55] **Nicole Behne:** Um, you can't hear the drive-by hallway conversations that happen at the workplace. The lunchroom brings a whole another level of anxiety. Because you've got microwaves going and refrigerators running and people talking all around, and it makes it really hard to focus on one conversation or carry on a conversation with all of that background noise.

[00:11:16] **Nicole Behne:** I'm even sitting in your cube. There's problems with that as well because, um, people can walk up behind you and ask you a question or start talking to you and you have no idea. Because as a person with hearing loss, I can't hear what's happening behind me. And actually when I moved in, into a different location at my office space, um, earlier in my career, If someone would walk up and start talking to me from behind, um, the person next to me caught on that.

[00:11:44] **Nicole Behne:** I wasn't hearing those conversations, and she would stand up over her cube and get my attention visually, and she'd say, Nicole, Joe's here behind you to say hi. And I'm like, oh, thanks. And so then I would turn around and look and I would know. Someone was there. But I mean, those are just really simple examples of um, you know, of how it's different.

[00:12:03] **Nicole Behne:** And the meeting space specifically is, has been really tough, Nick. Um, you'll see people with hearing loss and I can pick them out in meetings. I know who they are. I see them because they're more reserved. I know they have things to share, but they're leaning in. I see the, you know, the lean in with the turn to maybe their good ear leaning into the conference room table.

[00:12:24] **Nicole Behne:** They're looking around, and as I do, sometimes it looks like I'm watching a flip and tennis match because I have to see who's speaking in those meeting rooms. But they're looking around and I think that, you know, sometimes people with hearing loss in those meetings are afraid to ask questions. because they're not sure what was just said at the other side of the table and it maybe was already covered.

[00:12:45] **Nicole Behne:** And that's bit me a few times too, where I've, um, asked questions that were already asked because I didn't hear the conversation that was taking place in that big meeting room. And I have, I have two stories to share with the audience today. Yeah, around meetings. And, um, this first one is a row about how to be open and honest and ask for the seat at the table.

[00:13:08] **Nicole Behne:** Um, so to step back a little bit, in 2014, I was pro, um, promoted to the director level in my organization that I worked for. And as, as a result of that, I was invited to the executive strategy meetings every. And these executive strategy meetings, um, the business units present to the C e O and his direct reports and the c e o and the direct reports were in the front of the conference room in kind of a horse shape, horseshoe shaped table.

[00:13:38] **Nicole Behne:** And then there were classroom styles seating behind them. So maybe six to eight tables behind that front horseshoe where the rest of the people sat to be able to hear and learn what the other business units were presenting. So if you were presenting, um, your team was up in the front and then when you were done, you went into the back of the room and sat to listen to the rest of the organization's strategies being presented, if you will.

[00:14:03] **Nicole Behne:** Sure. And so, um, I only heard what was being presented when I was up front and I would spend days in these meetings in the back of the room and not hear all of the conversation that was happening. And Nick, it took me eight years. It was just this last year that I pulled the chair up to the front, to the horseshoe of the table with the executive team and I said, Hey, I need to sit up here because I have to hear what's being said.

[00:14:29] **Nicole Behne:** I need to know what's going on. And, and my whole company knew that I had a hearing loss, and yeah, they were like, of course, absolutely. You can sit up here. But that was just a, an aha moment for me that it shouldn't have taken that long for me to have the confidence to have that seat at the table. And that's part of what's driving me with this new business venture, is to make sure that others have the confidence to be able to pull that chair up and have a seat at the table.

[00:14:53] **Nicole Behne:** Yeah.

[00:14:54] **Nick Day:** Good. See you. It's,

[00:14:55] **Nicole Behne:** yeah, that's story number one. And now story number two happened a little further back even than that, and. It was probably about 15 years ago, and I was doing brand presentations and there was, um, another member of our leadership team was asking a question to me and I couldn't hear him, and so I asked him to repeat the question, which he did, and I still couldn't hear him.

[00:15:19] **Nicole Behne:** Then I asked him to rephrase his question and ask it a little bit differently, so maybe I could catch. And I still couldn't hear him, and I could feel the frustration, um, and, you know, just kind of the uncomfortableness that was happening in the room. So I looked to the person next to me and I'm like, what did he say?

[00:15:35] **Nicole Behne:** And then she repeated it to me, and of course I have the answer right away. But that moment, um, at, at that meeting, I then adopted what I call my wingman strategy. So when I go into big meetings, now the person sitting next to me I let them know ahead of time, I might need them to, um, repeat questions for me.

[00:15:56] **Nicole Behne:** Or take notes in meetings and debrief with me afterwards. So my wingman has a very important role in making sure that I am, um, successful in those meetings. It's really helped out a lot when we have like long conference room tables and like I mentioned before, I'm a lip reader, so I have to intently watch the people that are speaking at the table and if I wanna make a note or write down something as a follow up, as soon as I look down at my paper.

[00:16:25] **Nicole Behne:** I lose the next part of the conversation. Sure. So then I just will like nod at the person next to me and they'll take a note and either type it up or send it to me right after the meeting to make sure we're good to go. So my wingman and being honest have helped out so much in meeting spaces that, um, it's definitely part of my success factor and work.

[00:16:47] **Nick Day:** Fantastic. Well, great stories and I, I really appreciate you bringing them, well, bringing them to the show because hopefully this is resonating and landing with the HR professionals that listen to this, who want to be more inclusive. People are desperate to create more inclusive workplace cultures, more diverse workplace cultures as well.

[00:17:01] **Nick Day:** What, um, I wanna, I wanna talk about the diversity question just a moment. So something that came to mind to me that I wanna just park and I'll come back to, but just while I, while we've got you on, on this subject in a minute. When you mentioned the Wing, the wingman, um, I guess, tool that you started to use to make sure you can understand and hear what's going on.

[00:17:16] **Nick Day:** What other, uh, kind of accessibility tools are out there in the public domain would be very easy for an HR team or for a leadership team to, to bring into the workplace that would just make someone who has got, you know, loss of hearing make their lives a little bit easier that perhaps, you know, don't have to be overly expensive or that probably readily available, such as the captioning on Zoom, which we're using right now, which I was never aware of until we had this show.

[00:17:40] **Nick Day:** Are there other accessibility things that people need to be more aware of to make sure that they are creating. inclusive workplaces. Absolutely.

[00:17:48] **Nicole Behne:** And you, you actually hit the nail on the HUD with the video captioning that's available. So when the world shut down in 2019 or 2020 from Covid 19, um, we all switched to video conferencing.

[00:18:02] **Nicole Behne:** Right? Which, which was actually a blessing for me because everyone was now looking at me all the time and I could read them. And I went from catching maybe 50% of what was being in said, being said in meetings to 90 plus percent. We know these live captions aren't always accurate, but I'm filling in so many less blanks than I have been before.

[00:18:26] **Nicole Behne:** Um, so that's one thing that people can easily do in meetings, flip their laptop up, start a teams or zoom whatever video conferencing platform they have and turn on the lab captions. . Now, what makes it even better is if the meeting room you are in is wired with microphones throughout, then you can tap into the technology in that meeting space, and those microphones will feed the, um, the captions on your computer.

[00:18:57] **Nicole Behne:** And that is fantastic because your computer doesn't have as wide of a reach. Another thing that's really easy and it's, it's a little bit more recent. But all of iPhones and Androids now have live captioning built into their software. So you can go into your settings and accessibility and turn on live captions and at all times on my phone, I have a live caption option where it streams the conversations that are happening and it is fantastic.

[00:19:29] **Nicole Behne:** I was gonna show you here, but um, it's fantastic because this will, Um, run the conversation that's happening. Again, you're limited by the, um, by the, the, the pickup from the microphone of your, of your tool here, of your phone. But those are on, like I said, both Android and iPhones right now, today. The other thing is that as you think about some of the easy fixes, if you will, is really around spatial awareness.

[00:19:57] **Nicole Behne:** So when I walk into a meeting, There's so many things that go through my mind that don't go through the minds of someone who has normal hearing. I'm thinking about who's gonna be doing most of the talking in that meeting, and how do I position myself to make sure I can hear them. I'm also thinking about who's going to be doing, who is most people going to be doing the talking to?

[00:20:19] **Nicole Behne:** So if there's a senior leader in that meeting that everyone will be presenting to, I wanna place myself by them, because that's where all the sound projections will be aimed. Oh, the other thing is there are certain spaces that have. Um, loud fans, background noises that just don't work for me so ahead of time.

[00:20:40] **Nicole Behne:** If I know a meeting is scheduled in a room that's not good, I will ask that meeting scheduler to move to a different room where I know those acoustics are better. So when you think about spatial awareness in the meeting rooms, it's really walking the space and seeing. What's available, um, and, and where you can position yourself to have the most success.

[00:21:02] **Nicole Behne:** But I will say the one thing that is the most impactful is awareness. And the more people I have told about my hearing loss, the more inclusive they try to be. And, and it, it kind of takes away all of the, the negative stigma, if you will, around, um, having a hearing loss. And, um, I've learned throughout my journey, my hearing loss journey that it is so, Much more important for me to be, um, honest and open about what my needs are from a communication perspective than to try to hide it.

[00:21:39] **Nicole Behne:** Um, because that can lead to some really, um, to some friction and strained personal relationships along the way versus saying, I didn't hear you and I need to hear you. Sure. So this is what we should do differently. You play so much so in, you know, in meetings when you do introductions and you go around and say who you are and what your position is, I often start mine out with, hi, I'm Nicole.

[00:22:01] **Nicole Behne:** I have a hearing loss. And I need you to speak up in this meeting. Um, things will change a little bit from a normal meeting because if I don't hear you, I'm gonna ask you to repeat yourself. And you may see me walking around the room, and it's not to be distracted, but it's to make sure that I can hear the conversations that are happening from different spots in this conference room.

[00:22:21] **Nicole Behne:** So I'm open at the front of those meetings to let people know that it's gonna look a little bit different when with me in the room. And that has helped more than anything. People wanna help. They wanna be my wingman and make sure that you know that I'm getting what I need from a communication

[00:22:37] **Nick Day:** perspective.

[00:22:38] **Nick Day:** Yeah, fantastic. I mean, your energy, your passion, your confidence actually in this subject area shines through. And, uh, hopefully anyone else that is worried about stigma or worried about confidence or have anxiety about this, hopefully you, you know, just listening to this show and, and reading the notes of this show, they'll, they'll, they'll get that, that confidence to be able to speak up as you have, and, and hopefully they'll, they'll experience the same level of inclusivity that you've had by raising that awareness.

[00:23:01] **Nick Day:** And I don't wanna make any sweeping generalizations here, and please fire me down if I am, but I'm assuming as well, we think, you know, diversity, we know when it comes to studies, the more diverse our businesses, the more creative they are, the more productive they are, the more profitable they become. I mean, there's advantages to every type of diverse character we bring into a business.

[00:23:18] **Nick Day:** Right. And I would imagine even when it comes to hearing loss, there's that increased level of focus because you're, you're focused and tuned into everything that I'm saying. And the idea of the feeling for me of being listened to is so powerful. So, to know that you have that level of focus, I think that's a, a, a real advantage, uh, that can be utilized in the boardroom, but also, We live in such a distracted world at the moment, and we know that noises can be so distracting for the workforce.

[00:23:42] **Nick Day:** I, I would imagine there must be some focus benefits from that side as well. Like, can we include more people with, with hearing loss into our workforces? We can, we make them more, you know, diverse. There are actually, there are a number of creative and productivity based advantages from that as well. Now, obviously this is a new element for me, a new area, but these are things that immediately come to mind for me and I think I raise it because when we talk about diversity, typically, Most companies or businesses are, think when they think of diversity, think of race or ethnicity or gender or socioeconomic background or many other things.

[00:24:12] **Nick Day:** But disability actually often isn't included in that conversation. Of course, right? It should be. So, I would love to get your take on whether I'm, I'm right in, in those, um, thoughts that have popped into my head about some of the benefits there into the creativity and that focus, but also why do you think.

[00:24:30] **Nick Day:** When it comes to disability, and I obviously include hearing loss within that, it isn't always included like it perhaps should be when we think about diversity in the workforce.

[00:24:38] **Nicole Behne:** Absolutely. I'll start with, uh, the question around diversity in the workforce and, um, the disability piece of it. McKinsey and Company has come out with a statistic that said that there is over 8 billion annually spent on diversity training.

[00:24:53] **Nicole Behne:** Right. And you rattled off a bunch of the spaces that HR typically plays in. But that's really what this is all about. That's why I'm launching. This company is to help to increase the awareness around hearing loss inclusion. And there's a couple of things that I wanna touch on that. So today in the world, there are 1.5 billion people that have some degree of hearing loss.

[00:25:18] **Nicole Behne:** In the United States alone, there are 48 million people that have hearing moss with that they're not all old and. 60% of them are in the workforce or in education, and we have to be talking about this today because our workforce of tomorrow is changing. If you look at the statistics out there, you'll see that the workforce is aging, it's getting older.

[00:25:43] **Nicole Behne:** People are working longer because of, you know, the lack of, of saving and, and. Spending and inflationary issues that we've had right now, and according to the US Bureau of Labour Statistics, this 65 and plus age group is going to increase 35% in the next 10 years, so we'll have 35% more people that are 65 plus working.

[00:26:06] **Nicole Behne:** Why is that important for us today? It's important because hearing deteriorates with age in the age range from 60 to 70. 30%. Like I said, it's 27%, almost 30% of that age range has hearing. So if we're not talking about this right now, Nick, and starting to make hearing loss inclusion part of our de and I initiatives, we are gonna be so far behind.

[00:26:32] **Nicole Behne:** Now for those of us that are under 65, there is this really, like you talked about this negative, this stigma around admitting that you have hearing loss people. People think that it makes them feel less than or weak or old if they admit that they have a hearing loss. And I can't tell you how much I believe that stigma needs to change.

[00:26:53] **Nicole Behne:** Sure. It doesn't make you old, it makes you human. Right. It, that's part of who we are. But only one in five people that need hearing aids actually wear them. Only one in five, and the average person waits like seven to 10 years to get hearing aids, which is really troubling too, because as you wait, um, whoa, wait.

[00:27:15] **Nicole Behne:** Well, once you get hearing aids, your brain has to kind of get retrained to hear those sounds. And the longer you wait, the longer your brain will take to get retrained to hear those things. So it's, it's, it's all about. Right now taking the action that we need today in the workforce to be really inclusive about, yes, it's a problem today.

[00:27:36] **Nicole Behne:** 12 to 15% of the workforce has hearing aids. The tricky part is not everyone's talking about it. Our workforce is changing, it's getting older, and the older generations lose more hearing, um, just because that's, that's what happens in life, right? So that's why I'm so passionate about the fact that we need to.

[00:27:55] **Nicole Behne:** Talking about awareness, because when you bring that awareness, just think about, think about awareness when you, um, when you go through any of the other de and I trainings, you think about how that impacts your life and your openness, and empathy and understanding of that group that you just had the training on.

[00:28:12] **Nicole Behne:** And you use that training at work with your colleagues, but also at home, right? A lot of that training transfers just in life. And my hope is that as we start to raise that awareness and talk about the tips and tricks, uh, around hearing inclusion, it will also raise that awareness in total in life. So that was one part of your question.

[00:28:31] **Nicole Behne:** The second part was around focus and creativity. And I, I think it's important, um, right now what maybe we should do. There's part of that in this, um, this, um, Definition that I wanted to share with you today. So please, I know you're active on LinkedIn, right, Nick? Yeah, I am. I'm, you've seen all the rage right now, right now out there about ChatGPT, right?

[00:28:53] **Nicole Behne:** I have. Yep. So, um, are, so I was, I thought on LinkedIn, I asked my kids about it. I'm like, what is this AI tool? And they basically said, okay, mom, it takes all the, the information that's out there and it'll distil it into a really concrete answer for you. So I tried it and I had typed in the ChatGPT I said, what is hearing inclusion?

[00:29:16] **Nicole Behne:** Okay, so this is what ChatGPT had to say about that. So the term hearing inclusion generally refers to creating a workplace or social environment where individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing are welcome, respected, and able to fully participate and contribute. Hearing inclusion provides accommodations and accessibility tools such as sign language interpreters, closed captioning, assisted LI assisted listening devices, and text messaging to ensure that individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing have equal access to communication and information.

[00:29:48] **Nicole Behne:** Moreover, hearing inclusion also involves creating a culture of acceptance and understanding where individuals with different communication needs not only are accommodated, but also embraced and celebrated for their unique perspectives and experiences. By fostering hearing inclusion organizations and communities can tap into diverse talent, skills and perspectives of all individuals leading to a better collaboration, innovation, and overall perform.

[00:30:16] **Nicole Behne:** I couldn't have written that better myself on what is hearing inclusion and why is it so important? Right.

[00:30:22] **Nick Day:** Absolutely. No, it's a great example. I'll tell you something that, that landed with me when you talked about that one in five with the, the hearing aids, you know, they may need more. Obviously, there aren't enough out there.

[00:30:31] **Nick Day:** People for whatever reason, aren't getting support for their hearing needs. That must have a knock on impact. Then from an HR perspective on employee mental health, whether it's because they're not wearing them, whether it's because the anxiety of needing one, but we do know when it comes to work, the workforce, um, happiness, civil wellbeing, and, and the things that go with it.

[00:30:52] **Nick Day:** When you, if you are an HR practitioner right now, you want people to, you wanna eliminate as many of those mental health concerns and those social anxieties as possible because then you have the most productive workforce. So I guess hearing loss must have quite a big impact on employee mental health and therefore, this absolutely needs to be spoken about.

[00:31:10] **Nick Day:** It needs to be in a public domain because we need to be considering the needs of all of our employees, whatever those needs might be, which of course includes hearing.

[00:31:19] **Nicole Behne:** Absolutely. So, there's some staggering statistics around that, Nick. Um, we talked about before in the beginning of the podcast, how when you have hearing loss, it leads to frustration.

[00:31:28] **Nicole Behne:** Yeah. And when people are frustrated, that also leads into that social isolation that leads to depression. And Reuters health came out with a statistic that said untreated hearing loss. So people that are not wearing hearing aids have a 47% increase in depress. 47% increase. And then this, this next study came out just a few weeks back by John Hopkins, and this statistic is just as alarming, untreated hearing loss.

[00:31:59] **Nicole Behne:** People that need to wear hearing aids that don't are 61% more likely to have dementia. So huge mental health, um, situation there. You think about that isolation, your brain's not being used as much. Um, you know, you're kind of retreating. It does impact that mental health. It also has strained social relationships, which leads to that reduced productivity because of the execution piece of it.

[00:32:24] **Nicole Behne:** And then listening fatigue. We haven't even touched on listening fatigue yet, but listening fatigue is, Real. And it happens because people with hearing loss, like I've talked about, are trying to fill in the blanks all the time. And it can be exhausting because your brain is working on overdrive nonstop.

[00:32:42] **Nicole Behne:** So something I'd like to talk about to bring that to life. Um, have you ever driven in a downpour like torrential rains?

[00:32:50] **Nick Day:** Yeah. Yeah. And that increased level of focus you need to give. Right? It's exhausting.

[00:32:55] **Nicole Behne:** So, so you're driving through that rainstorm, right? And all you really get a glimpse of is the reality outside of your car when that wiper slides across the windshield.

[00:33:05] **Nicole Behne:** Right? You have that split second where you can see, yeah. Yep. Then after that drive, I mean, that one hour drive that you just did in that rainstorm, I mean, it makes you exhausted. Makes you feel like you, we've been driving all day. That is what it's like for people with hearing loss every single day because we are filling in the blanks all the time and we are trying to infer what we don't hear.

[00:33:31] **Nicole Behne:** So listening, fatigue is real. And the average person in corporate America spends about six hours a week in meeting. That's where you try to hear the most. And I think back to my old position, I was, I was in meetings over 30 hours a week, right? So it wasn't until I walked away from that that I realized how exhausted I was from listening and that listening fatigue, what that really can do to you.

[00:33:55] **Nicole Behne:** So again, um, live captionings have helped, live captions have helped with that tremendously. Um, technology is helping to be. To fill in those blanks for us, but you're spot on. From a mental health perspective, we have to start talking about this because it has a very detrimental impact on employees mental health.

[00:34:14] **Nick Day:** And I'm really glad you raised that. Cause I think what's, what's landed for me there is it's not just about implementing accessibility tools here, it's a much, you know, more broader that in terms of awareness is for HR practitioners and people to understand that actually it might mean that you need more regular breaks.

[00:34:28] **Nick Day:** It might need you, you know, more of that downtime to, to help with that fatigue as an example. You need to think about this more holistically to make not people just feel more included, but more supported as well. Yeah. And I think there's, there is, there's sometimes, um, One can be lost against the other.

[00:34:43] **Nick Day:** There's one thing about inclusion and saying we're doing everything we can, but actually that's not just about the tools. It's about making sure that you create a psychologically safe space for people to be able to perform. And if, you know, I have no experience of what that fatigue must feel like, but you've, you've actually demonstrated it very well through the, the windscreen wipe scenario.

[00:35:00] **Nick Day:** And I can fully understand that is an exhausting way of driving. And at the end of it, you know, you, you need a break, right? So, yep. If this is. If it's impacting, you know, this many people in the world and that, quite frankly, you, you, what you've also highlighted is many people listening to this now who may have perfect hearing may well be in the heart of hearing category later on because we know that hearing, you know, issues start deteriorate when you get older.

[00:35:23] **Nick Day:** So, you may well feel that you're listening to this now and think, well, this thing doesn't impact me. It could in the future. Great. So, we need to raise awareness for everybody. So, with that in mind, tell me a little bit more about World Hearing Day, because you brought it to my consciousness. I wasn't familiar with it before I met.

[00:35:38] **Nick Day:** Met yourself. And how does that work or apply to hearing inclusion?

[00:35:44] **Nicole Behne:** Yep. So, I think now is the time that we bring World Hearing Day down to the conference room table and start talking about hearing loss inclusion in the workplace. This day is one day of many days on the calendar year, right? But if we can all make a conscious effort to say there's World Hearing Day, what are we doing in our organization?

[00:36:04] **Nicole Behne:** How are we thinking differently about the inclusivity? Around our, the, the employees, um, in our workforce that are hard of hearing. What can we do differently? I'm also using World Hearing Day as a springboard to launch hearing inclusion and to offer services for companies today. Um, what I can do is come in for speaking engagement, where, where I help raise awareness and we talk about.

[00:36:29] **Nicole Behne:** Statistics on hearing loss. Um, what is hearing loss like? You asked right away in the beginning, how does it impact the co-workers? What is the mental health implications associated with that? And what are the tips for effective communication with hearing loss? So that's part of the awareness piece. Right?

[00:36:44] **Nicole Behne:** And then secondly, the workshops, like we talked about, it's. So important to go in and do the assessments and say, where's our starting point with hearing inclusion today? What needs to change in this organization? Um, like I said, it can be at the Cube, it can be in the meeting spaces, but to put that action plan together, and it has to be specific and customized for each organization because meeting rooms and technologies are all different.

[00:37:10] **Nicole Behne:** But let's use World Hearing Day to start the conversation. Let's use World Hearing Day to continue to every year, have that convers. In the workforce.

[00:37:19] **Nick Day:** Fantastic. So, I need everyone to listen. Really, that's what we need people to do. Listen to World Hearing Day. I know that sounds, uh, well, I think it's the right way to put it.

[00:37:27] **Nick Day:** We need to really shout about this and really bring it into public consciousness. We're gonna be releasing this show on the 3rd of March for that very, very reason. Now, actually, I. We talked about LinkedIn earlier. Um, I loved a quote that you recently highlighted on your LinkedIn feed. I wanted to bring it to the, to the masses today.

[00:37:42] **Nick Day:** It was a, a LinkedIn quote that you quoted by someone by Sha Eberts or Evers. I'm, which I pronounce Sur name, but she's co-author of the book here and beyond. And the quote was, by enlightening just one person about how to communicate with you, you create a ripple effect of awareness. Tell me a little bit more about why that quote in particular resonated with you.

[00:38:00] **Nick Day:** It certainly resonated with me when I read it. Support us really to this show today. So, tell me a little bit more about why that resonated with you.

[00:38:08] **Nicole Behne:** That ripple effect of awareness, um, makes people feel that they are not alone. Nick. I felt like I was very alone in my hearing loss journey when I first started out in corporate America.

[00:38:20] **Nicole Behne:** And I know that's not the case right now. And the more people that I talk about, they come, they, they talk to about it, they share their stories with me, they share their struggles with me as well, and then I can help them. To be their best selves at work too. I truly believe awareness is key and it does create that ripple effect, not only in the workplace, but think about the tips and tricks that you can learn, um, on how to communicate with someone who is hard of hearing.

[00:38:46] **Nicole Behne:** You can use that outside of work as well with friends and family members, maybe parents or grandparents who also have hearing

[00:38:53] **Nick Day:** problem. Fantastic. Brilliant. I'm glad you brought that up. And then I guess that leads me to ask one question, which is, you've talked a little bit about what hearing inclusion are trying to do.

[00:39:02] **Nick Day:** Your new, your new venture, your business is to help d e i leaders and HR teams. But if I wanna find out more, where do I need to go, uh, post, post this show, where can I find out and, and engage with yourself to, to, to help me raise more awareness of hearing inclusion in my.

[00:39:17] **Nicole Behne:** Absolutely. So, there's a website, hearing inclusion.com that people can go to.

[00:39:22] **Nicole Behne:** I also have a presence on LinkedIn, um, under my name Nicole Behne. They can email me nicole@hearinginclusion.com if they wanna learn more or have me come into their organizations to help start the journey there. So lots of spaces that they can engage with me and, um, we'll be sharing some tips and tricks on the website for communicating with people at work who are hard of hearing.

[00:39:45] **Nick Day:** Fantastic. And I will make all of those links available in the show notes as well. So, if you wanna find out how to contact Nicole, please do visit the show notes of this episode. You'll better access those straight away on World Hearing Day when this goes live. Um, so please do be, be a first adopter, be an early adopter, get into contact with Nicole and make sure that your HR strategy is absolutely hearing inclusive.

[00:40:03] **Nick Day:** The last question I wanna ask before we go into the vault, uh, Nicole, is this, which. When it comes to auditory related questions, I've obviously planned this show to try and get the best I can to help raise awareness, but is there any, are there any questions here that I haven't asked that you think this would be really helpful for your listeners?

[00:40:19] **Nick Day:** This is something that Nick, you know, I would like just to get out there to, to either reaffirm a point or to, to, to, to raise further awareness.

[00:40:27] **Nicole Behne:** No, I would just say I, uh, I talked to our friend ChatGPT on some of the tips for, um, working with people, communicating with people who are hard of hearing. So, I'm just gonna leave you with a few of those here next, as we closed out, as we closed out the show.

[00:40:40] **Nicole Behne:** So, number one, that ChatGPT said, speak clearly and directly, but don't shout or over articulate your words because that can distort your speech. Number two, get the person's attention. Make sure that the person, um, sees you. Before you start speaking to them and speak to them from the front, face-to-face communication is so impactful because people need to read your lips, avoid standing with your back to that person.

[00:41:05] **Nicole Behne:** Minimize background noise, repeat or rephrase, use visual aids and be patient and understanding. So great tips. I agree with all of them. I would add in, use closed captions, use your phone and find yourself a wingman to be successful at work. Thanks so much, Nick, for having me on today.

[00:41:22] **Nick Day:** Oh no. It's been my absolute pleasure.

[00:41:24] **Nick Day:** And of course, all of the links we've mentioned in today's show will be in the show notes. So please do go and visit hearing inclusion.com. Please do get in touch with Nicole if you wanna be a first across the line with really promoting hearing inclusion in your business. Nicole is passionate as you can hear from this show, and she's there to help you achieve better awareness for your employees.

[00:41:42] **Nick Day:** Let's make sure that we are creating inclusive. Diverse workplace cultures that does incorporate those with, you know, that are hard of hearing or therefore, or have other disabilities as well, I think's really, really important as we move forward. And of course, if you're an HR or L&D expert listening to the show and needs support with an HR related vacancy, do get in touch with myself or any of my team.

[00:42:00] **Nick Day:** You can reach us@jgabracooperman.com just leads me to say a huge thank you. To, uh, Nicole Benni today for joining me on the show on World Hearing Day as it will be released, and I look forward to bringing you the next episode of The HR L&D Podcast real soon. Thank you, Nicole. Thank you, Nick. That's it for today's episode of The HR L&D Podcast.

[00:42:19] **Nick Day:** I hope you found this discussion informative and thought provoking, and that it gave you actionable insights to help you drive your HR agenda forward. Please remember to subscribe to the show so you never miss a future. And I'd also love to hear from you. So if you enjoyed this show, please do leave a review on your preferred podcast platform.

[00:42:38] **Nick Day:** Your feedback helps me to ensure I can continue to bring you the topics and guests that matter most to you. Oh, and don't forget to share this show with your colleagues and fellow HR leaders as well. The more we spread the word, the more we can grow our community of HR professionals who I know are all as dedicated to driving the future of work forward as I am.

[00:42:58] **Nick Day:** Thanks, of course, for tuning in. My name is Nick Day. Please do look me up on LinkedIn and send me a connection request. It would be great to get connected. In the meantime, I look forward to bringing you the next episode of The HR L&D Podcast real soon.