

Matt Bowles: My guest today is Chiriga Moore, aka Zoe. She is an entrepreneur, world traveler, U.S. Army veteran, and the founder of [Moore Consulting Agency](#), a consulting firm affectionately known as [Grow with Zomo](#), which focuses on equity, diversity and inclusion in the hospitality, events, and tourism industries. She is the director of EDI for the meeting Professionals International Georgia chapter, and, in 2013, she was awarded the Global Social Impact Award by the Events Industry Council.

Zoe, welcome to the show.

Zoe Moore: Thank you for that. Thank you for having me.

Matt Bowles: Thank you for being on the show. I am super excited about this conversation, but let's just start off and talk about where we are recording from today. We are not in person. I am actually in the Blue Ridge mountains of Asheville, North Carolina today. And where are you?

Zoe Moore: I am in Mableton, Georgia, the fastest growing city in Cobb County, which is about 9 miles outside of Atlanta.

Matt Bowles: Let's talk a little bit about Atlanta. For people that have never been to Atlanta, can you talk about what you love about the ATL and for people that would like to come visit and spend some time and experience Atlanta, what would you put people onto?

Zoe Moore: I would say the culinary scene here, the food is very diverse. If you learn about the history, so food and history are going to be my top two, but they intersect. If you learn about the history of Atlanta, you'll realize that so many different people immigrated here, and as a result of that is just the cuisine is just so diverse and so delicious. Yeah. Food history and the fact that Georgia is just one of those states that has a little bit of everything. You can go to the mountains, you can go to the rivers, you can access all kinds of different places. So that airport is a major airport that gets you everywhere you want to go. But food history and just the access to so many different things.

Matt Bowles: Can you talk a little bit about that history because you are not originally from Atlanta? Can you talk about some of those dynamics of people migrating to Atlanta and its current role as a really vibrant black cultural hub?

Zoe Moore: I grew up in California and then later in my adult life went to Oakland. And then once I left Oakland, I was drawn to Atlanta because of its history in the civil rights movement. And so currently I am a storyteller for a company called Unexpected Atlanta, where I give these tours. And I've learned so much in the last year about the birthplace of Doctor King and all these civil rights leaders, the actions of John Lewis, do good trouble, and just its impact on changing the rest of the world.

Atlanta was referred to as the city too busy to hate because of it leading the way in the civil rights movement in regard to desegregation before it was a federal law. So, prior to that, you just had a whole bunch of different people migrating here for opportunity, education, or what the civil rights movement calls the Bible, the books and business, or the ballot. And so, a lot of voting, registration, and legislation occurred here and out of Atlanta. But, yeah, there's a lot of people that come here. There's a train station that terminated here. So, when you see the sign terminus, this is where a lot of people came to build and grow their wealth.

Matt Bowles: Well, you and I also have in common that we moved around growing up and lived in different places. I'm wondering if you can share a little bit about your journey and experience where you were born,

where you primarily grew up. And then when you think back as you were coming up, how did your initial early interest and travel start to develop?

Zoe Moore: So, I was actually born in Minneapolis, Minnesota. I jokingly say that the prince might be my father. My mom got pregnant at a Prince concert, so, oh, there's that. But I actually didn't spend a lot of time in Minnesota. My mom was in Job Corps there, I moved around to Blytheville, Arkansas, which is in the upper part of Arkansas, about an hour south of Memphis, Tennessee. Early childhood in Sunnyvale, California.

Now that's where I spent most of my childhood, elementary, junior high, high school and went to college in the Deep South. Xavier University, New Orleans, NOLA, as some people like to say, I didn't gain the freshman 15. I probably gained the freshman 30, because, again, the culinary scene there was amazing. But, yeah, I mean, I did move around, and I think the biggest thing that I can think about moving around was the contrast between living on the west coast and living in the Deep South, and then in my military career living on the east coast. And that gave me so much perspective and understanding the importance of diversity.

Matt Bowles: Can you talk a little bit about your choice to go to an HBCU? And just for our international audience that may not even be familiar with the acronym or the significance of HBCUs, can you explain that context and then explain your upbringing and then how and why you chose to go to Xavier?

Zoe Moore: Yeah, living in California, I went to PWIs, which is another acronym for predominantly white institutions, where my high school is a good example. I went to Homestead High School in Cupertino, Sunnyvale, California. The towns are right on top of each other, and out of my graduating class of nearly, like, 600, there are probably 30 Black students. And so, we're looking at a large population of white students, Asian, a smaller percentage of Hispanic but Black students were a very small portion of that.

And so, I yearned, even though I didn't know much about Black history, because you're not taught that in these schools. I yearned to be around the Black community because I had a lot of questions about that history and just about myself that I was not learning. And so, when I heard about HBCUs, which are Historically Black Colleges and Universities, HBCUs were coined or got their start shortly after the emancipation proclamation, which is when those who were enslaved were freed, in all intents and purposes.

And those schools were started as institutions to make sure they had access to education. They were funded by different groups to make sure, again, that those who are formerly enslaved could transition into being good citizens, if you would. And so HBCUs have grown in number since the 19th hundreds and offer Black students a chance to connect with the community, learn their history, be surrounded by melanin, and just really kind of emerge themselves within Black culture and an appreciation for who we are as a community.

Matt Bowles: When you got to Xavier in New Orleans, can you share a little bit about what that experience was like once you finally got into that environment and then take us through that in terms of your transition and decision to eventually join the military?

Zoe Moore: The first reaction is, I found out that I wasn't as Black as I thought I was. That was my first encounter with the Deep South. I mean, there were many encounters, but going to the school, when you're from California, you're tokenized, in a sense, even within the Black community. I received a lot of inquiries

about me speaking properly. And it was the first time outside of maybe visiting Oakland, when I lived in California, being immersed in the Black community. I mean, sometimes in the summers when I go to visit my grandma in Blytheville, I would experience it.

But this was the first time where now I, as an adult, a young adult, deeply emerged in the South and Louisiana is a special place, New Orleans in particular. But at the time, 1999, it's very black and white, that segregation, it has that residual impact. Although desegregation happened in the sixties, by law, socially and culturally, you feel it in the South, and you felt it in the school as well. And the curriculum is very different than what I experienced growing up in a PWI, that Predominantly White Institution.

And I just had a lot of self-discoveries, and it was very challenging. It was a culture shock for me that I just was not prepared for. And I love being a Black woman more so today than I understood then as a college student. And it took me some time to fully understand where that internalized low self-esteem came from. So, I credit that to going to an HBCU and first sparking that interest or that awareness, but it didn't happen right away.

Matt Bowles: So, can you talk about then what was your transition into the military?

Zoe Moore: So, I hated going to school. I could not wake up for class on time. I just was very mature for my age, so, I wasn't into the parties. I was deep into Christianity by the time I went off to college. So, there's a lot of things about the college life that just did not appeal to me. And then again, being kind of tokenized as the Cali girl, the Cali girl with the proper accent, I just was having a hard time adjusting. And I remember it wasn't some patriotic moment. It wasn't a be all, you can be commercial.

It really was. I was in Walmart and one of my roommate's friends was buying a laptop, and it was a pretty expensive laptop to a college student. And I was like, how are you affording buying yourself this piece of equipment? And she was like, no, I'm a reservist. And I'm like, what? What is that? Army reserves? And so, I just started doing my research and finding out, oh, there are other ways to jumpstart your career outside of college. And I just don't think college is for me. I started just doing more research, and when I returned home for the winter break, I started talking to recruiters. And then eventually I signed the dotted line. And once I finished my first year at Xavier, I decided to join the army reserves.

Matt Bowles: Well, I am really interested in your personal consciousness raising journey over the course of your military service. You and I have had a number of really substantive discussions about our shared critiques of the military industrial complex and US imperialist foreign policy and so on and so forth.

So, I would love to go through some of your military experiences that you had, just sort of with that reflective lens on the different seeds that were planted at various points along that journey that eventually led you to your present-day awareness about these types of issues. Can you share a little bit? Maybe just sort of at the very beginning what that was like getting into the military and then your very first deployment?

Zoe Moore: Yeah. My decision to join the military was survival, really. I mean, also a challenge. You know, I thought that because I wasn't ready for college, I needed something that was going to allow me to have some income and be independent. But then second to that, I just didn't want to be bored and going to school bored me. You see all the hoorah and the Hua commercials and the uniform and the running with weapons and all that kind of stuff.

And basic training just sounded exhilarating. And so, I did. I went to basic training. I went to advanced training school as a civil affairs specialist. And what you do learn in that is how to engage with the host country. So, before I even knew it, I was being prepared for deployment in a foreign country, how to engage with the local population. And so, I was a reservist, and I was also working as a personal trainer for a company called Timeout Services. And so, I was just doing my one arm push-ups and working out groups of very wealthy people in the Bay Area.

And I remember driving my little Honda Accord to one of the schools. I was giving one of my classes, and I heard on the radio stations, like, they just bombed the World Trade Center. And I was like, oh, one of these DJ jokes and funny stories, like they're just being clowns. Turned off the radio, went in, did my group exercise, and then everybody was buzzing, talking about it, and everybody's, oh, I'm getting all these messages, and things are happening. So, I remember we turned on the radio in my car, and we were just listening to this incident unfold at the World Trade Center.

And next, I'm getting calls from my reserve unit. It's time to come in. This is not a drill. Grab your uniform, grab everything. Come into the unit. And so, went in. We sat around for hours, and weeks went by, and we were just told that our lives were going to be put on hold until they figured out what deployment looked like. While waiting, I just made the decision that I can't wait. I have college classes. I got a life. I don't know what I'm going to do.

And I talked to an officer, and they were like, you should go active duty. And so, I was like, what does that even look like? He was like, well, you do some photography and stuff for the unit. What if I can get you a role as a combat photographer? And I was like, ha, they don't have combat photographers in the army. And he was like, yeah, have you ever seen a full metal jacket? And I was like, yes. And, you know, and he was like, that role really exists, and I can get you that job.

And so, before I knew it, shortly after 9/11, I was being shipped to Fort Meade, Maryland, and I trained at the defense information school as a combat photographer and videographer. That took about nearly two years of training, and then everything got kicked off, and I was shipped out to Iraq. I first went through Kuwait, and interestingly enough, I was in Kuwait pushing through to Iraq when then President Bush said that the war had ended.

And looking back on all of that now, that informs my understanding of the military industrial complex and the imperialist foreign policy that comes out of our country where we tell the American people one thing, and there is something else that's going on behind the scenes. And the interest of what those things are isn't the same message that's being told.

And so that journey for me was a slow awakening, because I think what you're told in school, on the news, I had to kind of unlearn all of that while asking questions in a way that wasn't feeling like a conspiracy theorist, but it was definitely being exposed to me. Especially, like, when I was in Iraq, a professor came up to me and asked me questions like, why are you here? And I really couldn't answer that question other than what I was told in briefings and other subsequent incidents that I see with my own eyes, you know, and interactions just started, basically just a timeline of curiosity.

I became very curious and started reading more, engaging in more conversations that in the past, I wouldn't have touched with a ten-foot pole. But once I started to do that, that just led down to the need for thinking critically about information that was fed. And now, as a consultant, that probably. That's the one thing that I

teach the most, is the importance of critical thinking, reading for yourself, having a deeper understanding. All of that has been a slow evolution, but a very powerful one, where each part of my life has played into who I am today.

Matt Bowles: And can you talk about your experience leaving the military for the first time when you got pregnant and then what your life was like in the path that you chose after you got out of that first experience in the military?

Zoe Moore: Yeah, you know, my first time, it was 1999, I was delayed entry, and then I ended up getting out in 2004, just months before giving birth to my son. I would say I lacked the discipline in many terms to be in the military, and I may change that wording now because I just really wasn't good at being broken down and being built up. It is a benefit to who I am now. But it was a lot of drill sergeant mentality and senior ranking people just more tearing you down.

That wasn't the lifestyle that I was used to. My mom used to always say, I don't cuss at you. Who gets permission to cuss at you? And there were many times where I would challenge authority so when I was given the opportunity to get out, because, you know, I come back from Iraq, got married about two years before getting pregnant, and then I was on my way to Afghanistan, and my then husband, my son's father, was like, I got to get you pregnant.

Efforts weren't working. And then about two weeks before shipping out to Afghanistan, he said, your menstrual cycle should be on the back of a milk cartage. And I was like, what are you talking about? And he was like, you didn't get your cycle. You're pregnant. I know you are. And so, I was just looking at my son's birth records and realized that when I got that test, that was December 23, that I found out that I was pregnant. And that was just about eight days before shipping out to Afghanistan.

I say now that my son, Jordan Moore, saved my life because several people in my unit lost theirs. So, I got out because I was holding a slot for someone else to be shipped out to Afghanistan, gave birth to my son, and kind of was floundering as a civilian. I hadn't finished my time at Xavier, so I didn't have a degree. I didn't really know what I wanted to do. My career counseling in high school wasn't that great, and I just was kind of, what do I do next?

So, I took a few classes at a local community college, was struggling financially living with my mom, and I remember being on the playground back at the apartment that I grew up at and seeing one of the young girls that I used to babysit and saying to myself, this cannot be my life. This can't be. So, I need to re-enlist back in the military. I need to figure this out. Talk to my son's father. We were going through a divorce and just said, this is what I have to do. Like, I have to go back to the military.

You're going to have to take care of your son. About two days before reenlisting in the army, my divorce was finalized. I raised my right hand, and swore back in. And then the second round of going into the military, I was much more disciplined and disciplined in the way that I needed to be to build my life, and that was going to school, using my post 911 GI bill, and paying off all of my bills, and going to the job training that I needed to just really focused on I've got to get myself together, and I got to figure out what I want to do, because nobody's going to take care of me like, I'm going to take care of me, and I have to take care of me in order to take care of my child.

That second time around really had a lot to do with healing, especially because of my time in Iraq. But there was a definite contrast between my time as a reservist in the active duty and then that second portion, being fully active duty and navigating my adulthood.

Matt Bowles: Can you talk more about what you mean by 'the motivation being healing'? And I know you and I have had a number of conversations just in terms of the type of trauma, obviously, that's experienced as part of that. And can you talk about the way you were thinking about that when you were motivated to re-enlist in 2007?

Zoe Moore: Yeah. You know, being in Iraq, you see things that I say no human should ever see. That's a combination of death and destruction on both sides. So, I've seen us soldiers killed. I've seen soldiers be amputated. I've seen those on the opposing side, if you would be injured and wrapped up, banded up, and infirmaries and things like that. And so, when you're exposed to that, and, you know, at one point, I've lived out of a Humvee, and I used to cook a cup of noodles and sardines in the hot sun and not knowing what was going to happen day to day, using packs of water bottles to protect us from mortar rounds or RPG's.

And that was a time where Donald Rumsfeld said, you know, you go to war with what you have, not with what you need. And so, it really was this isolating period of my life where I'm in a foreign country. That was my first time really traveling to Kuwait, to Iraq, and not knowing if I was going to live the next day. Every time you go outside of the wire, you're just exposed to the elements and the threat of war.

And that's my day to day. You know, waiting for different cars to pull up and checking each car with a mirror, not knowing who is a friendly, not knowing who you identify as an enemy. Right? And so, when you lose life, your comrades to death, when you can't do anything, you want to put yourself in a position where you can.

And so, I'm a person that's very solution driven. And so, when I got out, knowing that there are lives that I had seen expire right there in front of me, that I wanted to go back in, being able to contribute to that medically. And so, I went back in as a surgical assistant. Assistant and trained in Fort Sam Houston in Texas into the medical field as a 68 delta. That's the military operations specialty or MOS, and just learned about anatomy and the body, and, you know, all of that.

Took some really hard tests, watched some really difficult videos. And then I was stationed initially in Washington, DC, where mass casualties would come in from Germany. And eventually, I would feel like that experience being in that hospital was more traumatic than actually being in combat, because you would see soldiers come in, and the next morning, we would be informing their families that they didn't make it. I traded one trauma for the next, but it definitely just made me appreciate life that much more.

But the straw that broke the camel's back was really, I had transitioned to Fortune Knox, Kentucky, worked in the hospital there on base, and my responsibility there was our operating room to focus on general surgery, ortho. So, you know, broken bones and things like that, and also emergency C sections. And at one point, a mother gave birth to a stillborn. And it was my responsibility, once the doctors and the nurses left, to clean the room, and that was to dispose of the baby, who no longer had any life in it. And so, I had seen grown men die. I had seen babies die. And at that point, I was tired of death. And so, I asked to be transitioned to another MoS, military operations specialty. And that was putting myself behind a computer in a dark room in the NSA, the National Security Agency, as a cybersecurity specialist. So, a very stark

contrast in my career, and journey throughout the military. But it was a journey that taught me a lot about death and how to appreciate life.

Matt Bowles: Well, another experience that I want to ask you about is living in Korea, 2010 to 2011. Can you explain how that came about, the context and what your experience was like in Korea?

Zoe Moore: Yeah, Korea was a great experience. Now, Korea is what really, you know, you described in my bio as being a world traveler. That is what made me realize it was possible to travel the world, not know the language, not know a lot about the culture, but that I could do it. And so, when I was in Fort Knox and I needed to actually get some training or, you know, I had to pick and choose my different duty stations when I transitioned from medical into psychology, cybersecurity.

And so, you have to do a long deployment. And I was given the option to go to Mississippi. And I am not a fan of the state, no harm, no foul with Mississippians, but as a historian, Mississippi was not one of those places that I wanted to go. I went back and forth with maps and the different individuals I had to speak with negotiated to go to Korea, and super cold snow on the ground. You know, we were given all these orders once I got there, and that was in the top of 2010, so January 2010.

And I remember just how cold it was, but all the orders were really, you have to stay on base for, like, I don't know, it was some ridiculous amount of time, like, four weeks before you're even able to go off. And I defied that. I still had a little bit of rebellion in me, and I defied that because I wanted to not eat the food that was on base, and I wanted to be around the Korean folks, the civilians, and so hopped in a few taxis and talked a lot with my Katusas, which are the Korean augmentee soldiers, that they're augmented to the US army.

You know, just navigated my way and learned Korea to the best of my ability and also just try to pick up on the language more. So having the Katusas, the Korean soldiers write down and me showing the different civilians and them appreciating the effort that I made to connect with the culture, taste the food, explore, and, yeah, that just opened me up to a whole new world of traveling.

Matt Bowles: Well, I know you were also an equal opportunity representative as a soldier. Can you talk a little bit about how that came about and then what that experience was like?

Zoe Moore: Yeah, that's actually the story that I tell many times in how I became an EDI consultant. Right. Because this was a time that, 'don't ask, don't tell' was lifted, and that was the legislation that was barring homosexuality in the military. Although it wasn't saying that people that are of the LGBT community couldn't join the military, it was telling the community that you better not tell about who you are, which is the same.

You can't talk about your lived experience. You can't talk about who you love. If we are to find out that you are talking about it, then they would take action to get that soldier out of the US army, which could greatly impact somebody's life. And so that was lifted. And my first sergeant at the time just was so uncomfortable with the topic of LGBTQ, and I, too. I mean, at the time, I was still kind of evolving out of Christianity, asking more questions than I ever would. But when it was lifted, I did have soldiers that identified as being gay and lesbian and things like that and great soldiers, great people.

And when it was lifted, my first sergeant was like, I don't know what to say in front of the soldiers. I just know they can't say gay anymore, and they can't be mean to gay people. And I'm just going to say that. So, he gets out in front of the formation, and he was like, listen, everyone, if you say anything bad against gay

people, I'm going to give you an article 15, and you're going to get out the military, and that's it. And so, me, I was like, that's not going to be enough. We need to have conversations. We need to let our soldiers ask each other questions, get to know each other because we are being set up. You know, we're in a combat zone.

South Korea is still a combat zone because of the threat from North Korea. And we're going to also be deployed to other areas, and we're going to have to have each other's back. And we need some training. We need some workshops on this. And so, my first sergeant did what most people in the military, terry, know about that. He told me what it was like, you're going to go to training to become an equal opportunity representative, and that two months, maybe a little bit shorter than that, it was a training period that literally changed my thinking.

It was probably the most that I had ever learned about systemic oppression and even what that meant in regard to just history and civil rights legislation and the different social identities and low and behold, years later, that would be what set the foundation to me becoming a consultant that I am now.

Matt Bowles: Can you talk a little bit about the dynamic inside the military? As you were learning about these things and having these different seeds planted or these light bulb moments or realizing these different things over the course of your military experience, were you able to talk with other people about those things inside the military? Were other people also realizing and trying to process some of this stuff and come out with their own views about it as well? And sort of on this same journey of critical learning and critical thinking through what you were experiencing? Like, what was that dynamic like?

Zoe Moore: It wasn't a conversation that we had regularly. That time period of being in training was the most that I had ever discussed it. It began to help to take off my rose-colored lenses, and it wasn't an individual journey. I remember my thinking had changed so much that when I was overhearing conversations about how people felt about different situations that they listened to on the news or things that we were being informed about, it would make me cringe because I had a deeper understanding at that time. I just didn't know how to articulate it, what I was learning.

And so, my journey of evolution took place over different occasions and accumulated over time. Prior to coming in the military, I was the Black student union president. But then once I got into the military to become that equal opportunity representative. First, I was in Iraq and exposed to information that we weren't talking about, just different times. I remember being in a session and all the walls were lined with these different leaders, which were old white men. And we were talking about equal opportunity. And it was like black History Month or something that was going on, stood up.

And it was the first time that I challenged a senior leader. And I was like, how are we talking about black history and equal opportunity? And you look to our left and our right, and every single leader who's risen to a position of power in the military has been white. When are we going to talk about that? When are we going to talk about reality and at ease, soldier. And once they say at ease, that means you sit down, and you better not go any further because it's between the command that they give and Article 15 or the brig. You know, you get your options.

And so, individual journey, very slow journey, and it really didn't come to impact me until about 2012. And that was the murder of Trayvon Martin when I was in the military. And I had reached that boiling point where people were talking about this young 17-year-old as he was a thug. And did you see that one picture

where he had the weapon? Did you see him doing this? And they were putting him on trial. And I'm like, this is a 17-year-old boy. Like, what is going on? What is wrong with you? And I'm a Republican. I'm this, I'm that. And I'm like, what does that have to do with your humanity?

And I just started getting in arguments at work, and I was going through a lot, you know, at that time. And it just began to really shake my whole foundation of my understanding of why I was serving in the military and who I was surrounding myself with. And so that's what started to unravel.

Matt Bowles: And can you talk about from there the path to what you are doing today, and founding [Grow with Zomo](#) and give folks a little bit of sense of your professional work that you're doing today?

Zoe Moore: Yeah, absolutely. So, unfortunately, George Zimmerman was acquitted for that murder of Trayvon Martin. That was a social reckoning. That really happening happened across the U.S.. You know, this is pre-George Floyd, right? And this is when Black Lives Matter started. And so, my journey to get out started in 2013. I finalized that paperwork, got out in 2014. And in that time period, the stress of everything was so bad that I ended up losing the child. And that's what led to just kind of like, this mental breakdown of, like, I've got to get an out. This is not good. When I did get out, I still was trying to figure out once again what I was going to do as a civilian.

And so, I applied for a few schools in California because I wanted to return back to family, where my mom was, and got into a master's program at Cal State East Bay. And that's northern California. That's Hayward, California. So go to school. And then my thesis was focused on urban sustainability and how mediums and events impacted underserved communities. And I was just really interested in this topic. Learned about meeting professionals international from my professor, Thomas Padrone, and exposed me to one of these events called the annual conference and Expo.

Went to that trade show floor, which was at the Moscone in San Francisco, and just learned how the industry worked. And I was amazed at all these different hotels and caterers and different people making these events happen. And when I'm at this association and when I'm at these events, it was very white, and I was one of few Black women that were there. But it wasn't even that that really kicked off my journey. It was the fact that as a student, and there was about 20 to 30 other students with me who were being ignored, in a sense, by the people who were at the trade show, because what we didn't understand is that they were sales reps for their companies, and they had a quota to meet, and so students weren't going to help them meet that quota.

So, when students came up, they were like, here, take this swag, take a bag, take a pen, leave me alone. So that I can get to an event planner who's actually going to help me meet my benchmarks or meet my quotas, right? And so, I pulled all the students together and began to advocate for them, like, hey, these are your future leaders of the industry. You need to talk to them and engage with them. You never know what money you're leaving on the table. You don't know who their professors are, their parents are, blah, blah, whatever else. And I just started this advocacy for anybody who was marginalized.

And that became the person I was known as in that association. You know, what would Zoe do? What would Zoe do in a situation where we have a person that's in a wheelchair that can't get into the venue? What would Zoe do if someone felt discriminated against or experienced sexism? And they would come to me with all these questions. And I just realized that there was a need for this conversation. And so went through multiple iterations of my business, and then in 2021, just came up with more consulting agency. It

was the easiest way to name my business because I knew that I was always going to be a more affectionate, it's called [Grow with Zomo](#) because of what people used to always say, like, what would Zoe do?

And I would let everyone know I don't have all the answers, but I'm constantly growing and evolving and learning. And just like my slow evolution of learning throughout the military and throughout my life, that's the journey that I take clients on. Ask a lot of questions, be curious, do some critical thinking, strengthen your emotional intelligence, and let's grow together. That's my whole tagline.

Matt Bowles: One of the things that you have done throughout your content is reframed the common acronym DEI (Diversity, equity and inclusion), as EDI (Equity, diversity, and inclusion). Can you explain why you do that and how that informs your work?

Zoe Moore: Yeah. Living in the Bay Area, when the tech industry really inspired me, becoming a consultant in DEI, initially, how I entered it, because there was a lot of conversations around diversity recruiting and diversity. Diversity, diversity. That was the primary topic. And. But what I was hearing from a lot of these companies is that they would recruit for diversity, but what you would find is those same people that they recruited about a year later that talented was leaving because that environment was not an environment in which they could thrive.

I started saying a quote that kind of flipped that, and I said, you know, what needs to happen is that inclusion needs to be the behavior, you know, the behavior of the people that they work with, the recruiting the leaders of that organization. And equity needs to be a strategy. You need to constantly work towards being equitable in that organization, and then diversity will be a result. So that was my, my quote. An inclusion is the behavior. Equity is a strategy. Diversity will be a result.

And so, I just started playing around with the acronym and saying my focus to put an emphasis on the e, on the equity, because if we can't discuss the conversation around equity, that people do not have the resources that they need to thrive, then you will not create an environment that's inclusive. You will not behave in an inclusive manner.

But when you do that, when you prioritize equity and inclusion, then you create an environment which people of all different social identities are attracted to, and they will be drawn to. And so, to get the results that people were seeking, they first had to work on their organization or simultaneously work on themselves as leaders, work on their environment, and make sure their processes and procedures reflected their commitment to the outcome that they were seeking.

Matt Bowles: Well, I'd love to go a little bit deeper on the way that you actually work with organizations when they have you come in as a consultant. You start off with doing what you call a power of eight assessment. Can you share a little bit about what that is and how that works?

Zoe Moore: Yeah, I go through multiple iterations of figuring out what works the best. I like frameworks, and the power of eight is one of the many frameworks that I use. But the framework that I focus on more now than the power of eight is called insight to implementation. It uses the same kind of steps where the insight is gathering, gathering information. And so, you gain insight by reviewing websites, by looking at social media, looking at different policies, looking at just everything that that organization is really using to create how they operate, their standard operating procedures.

I'm examining all of that. And then once I gather that insight, I inform the organization of what recommendations I have, what feedback I have. And then, so I, I just go through this step process, several phases, about five phases, till we get to implementation. So, I take companies from insight to implementation, and in those phases is a phase of innovation where you take what insight that you've gathered, you know, what has worked well, what needs to change, what needs to improve or things like that, and then what are you going to do strategically to make those changes.

And then once you innovate and you put forth that strategy and you implement that, you also have to go back and measure that incremental growth so that you can iterate it over and over again until you produce better outcomes more consistently. Yeah, I like frameworks the most. And that's what the power of aid is. It's a framework that ensures that the consultant, myself, or anybody that I'm working with on my team is on the same page as the client that we're working with.

So different organizations, from venues to destinations, nations who have this aspirational goal that everybody says, oh, we want to be inclusive, we care about everybody. And that's an aspirational words and sentiments that people have, but I want to take them from being aspirational to operational. How do you integrate it into all your decision-making?

Matt Bowles: When you think back about the organizations, especially in the travel and tourism industry, that you have worked with over the years, years, what results or impact have you seen?

Zoe Moore: My favorite one is supplier diversity. Supplier diversity began with looking at preferred vendor lists. So when you go to any type of venue, when you go to a museum, when you go to a concert venue, name any venue that you go to execute an event, they all have some sort of preferred vendor list, whether that's formal or informal, and that's a list of businesses that they'll work with to provide catering, photography, audiovisual, so forth and so on.

And so, when I was in Oakland and really getting into this conversation and structuring my business as a consultant, I started asking these different companies, what does your preferred vendor list look like? Because I knew that businesses that I was working with in Oakland that were predominantly black owned businesses were struggling to get these contracts, struggling to get an opportunity to work with these different venues.

And so, when I asked those questions, I would see that the companies on their list were overwhelmingly white, male owned, or there was just not a lot of diversity. And so that was the first step. There was a lack of representation. So, then my next question really was, what is the process for small businesses to get on your preferred vendor list? And that's where you would get, oh, we don't really have a process. We just select people that we like without realizing that they were defaulting to their affinity bias. Right. You know, picking people within their network, within their friend group that were members of associations.

And so, I started challenging people as a historian. I started to learn that this conversation was not new. Supplier diversity was something that started very heavily in Detroit around the automobile industry, and that was the federal government's push in order for the automobile industry to thrive or to continue on. The federal government charged it with having to work with minority owned and businesses. So, I took that same type of context and moved into the meetings and events industry and said, hey, we need to set criteria around how much money you're allocating towards investing in small businesses.

And are you measuring the impact that you have on small businesses when you're hiring different photographers, caterers, artists, speakers and things like that? How are you tracking it? And so that's what I see the most impact because it is something that is measurable. It is something that challenges event organizers, venues, and different leaders in the industry, to say, hey, oh, you're right. I don't have any diversity. And also, there's money that I'm losing on the table.

And one of the examples I love to use is with South Asian weddings, with Indian weddings. The families are very particular about who makes their food and who makes their clothing. Very lush and large weddings and events. And typically, they keep it in the house for the family. But a lot of the aunties and uncles get tired of doing the work, so they want to hire planners. And one gentleman came to me, and he was like, there are no planners who are educated or culturally competent on traditions, customs, our culture.

That's what I want you to do. I want you to go to educate. I want you to go find the south Asian planners and get them to be educators and things like that. And I started having that conversation, and that, fed into supplier diversity is letting a lot of people know who very Eurocentric in their thought process are. You know, when it came to a wedding, they were looking at a western version of a wedding and didn't know anything about south Asian or even African American traditions.

Yeah, supplier diversity and just diversifying the way that we think has been the conversation that has had the most impact across businesses, because, again, it's something that you can assess and then measure.

Matt Bowles: All right, we're going to pause here and call that the end of part one. If you would like to find the following, connect with Zoe. We are going to link up all of her contact info and social media handles in [the show notes](#) along with direct links to everything we have discussed in this episode. You can find all of that in one place at themaverickshow.com. Just go there and go to [the show notes](#) for this episode. And remember to tune in to the next episode to hear the conclusion of my interview with Zoe Moore. Good night, everybody.