
LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS: CREATING A DIALOGUE ABOUT RACE

Here is a simple fact: humans are not good at talking kindly to one another about things they are passionate about. Or about things that are highly personal and sensitive. It doesn't matter the topic. We are terrible at having meaningful dialogue.

Then we add into that the backdrop of the stress of Covid-19, the stock market, firings and furloughs, unavailability of gyms, kids at home... Really! This is an incredibly hard time. And now we are asking our colleagues to engage in one of the toughest conversations we can have – dialogue about race.

This country is grappling with its history. We once were a country where it was acceptable to own another human. We put up with that. We also put up with segregation, discrimination, insensitivity to pay gaps and more. And now, we not only need to engage in dialogue, but here is what Scott Stringer, NYC Comptroller, is saying to 67 companies in the S&P 100: “We’re asking companies that condemned racism to walk the walk...It’s not enough to condemn racism in words, systemic racism in corporate America is going to require concrete action” ([Reuters Business News NYC Comptroller](#)).

We applaud the many organizations—Apple, Microsoft, Quaker Oats, Mars, and others—that are taking action to demonstrate their commitment to abolishing these deeply engrained patterns of racism. Many of the CEOs we are working with are asking, “What can I do?”

1. Start with emotional intelligence. Your leaders require EI, or the dialogue can't work. Period.
2. Create a structure for psychological safety and candid dialogue.
3. Teach skills so that dialogue shifts the patterns of deeply entrenched, moldy, and totally archaic mind models that humans have held onto.
4. Keep the dialogue alive. Racism is not a problem to be solved like low inventory or poor sales. Racism has deep historical roots that require new mental models for everyone.
5. Be a warrior for your culture – fight like you mean it. No trespassing, boundary blunders – zero tolerance. Racist acts and language are absolutely unacceptable no matter how important you are or how many zeroes are at the end of the sales you bring into the company. Period.
6. Let people speak with no repercussions about the issues that concern them.
7. Demonstrate empathy and let people tell their stories no matter how hard they are to hear. We need to hear them.

As for any change, the key is in the deeds, not the words. It cannot be a box checked that looks good yet has no significance.

Remember to:

1. Ensure that dialogue and “solutions” lead to actions and follow-up.

2. Check the “solutions” with people who are impacted by those solutions.
3. Hold people accountable if they break the rules.
4. Never think this is “done” ... the conversation about race is something that has to be ongoing.

We have found some references and a LinkedIn video that might be useful for you and your teams:

[HBR - Is your company actually fighting racism or just talking about it](#)

[HBR - U.S. businesses must take meaningful action against racism](#)

[HBR - Race at work](#)

[Amazon - White fragility - Why it is so hard for white people to talk about racism](#)

[Amazon - So you want to talk about race](#)

[Amazon - How to be an antiracist](#)

[LinkedIn Video - HBR Quarantined](#)

What are you leading your organization to do about racism within its walls and within the communities it operates in?