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LETS TALK ABOUT RACE

A GUIDE TO CREATING SAFE SPACES TO DISCUSS
RACE IN THE WORKPLACE

Many managers are perplexed by the #BlackLivesMatter movement. The murder of George Floyd for the world to see has sparked a global awareness of social injustice, discrimination, systemic racism and the impact and trauma that it has had on black people for hundreds of years.

Now a topic that was once forbidden in the workplace is a necessity. It can no longer be avoided. The current civil unrest now requires us to discuss the Black American Experience. This means that we are going to have uncomfortable, difficult, and triggering conversations at work. It will be an ethical, moral failure that could negatively impact the bottom line if it's not discussed.

This guide will provide ways to begin the dialogue in having the difficult conversations. Implementing these strategies will help create the environment to have the tough conversations. It is not intended to be a "quick fix" but rather a guide for better understanding, knowledge and approaching the subject of racism and social injustice.

Tracy Y Washington
Creator of the Relationship Leadership Philosophy

IT'S GOING TO BE UNCOMFORTABLE

Up until now it's been forbidden to talk about race and culture, and you have NO CHOICE but to face. It's going to take you out of your comfort zone. Your brain is resisting, and your fight or flight response is going to kick in. ***DON'T RUN AWAY FROM THE ISSUE.*** This is natural and normal but like any obstacle – you must face it. Take a deep breathe, calm your mind.

THE HARD PART IS GETTING STARTED

Prepare before you talk. Read blogs and articles, watch documentaries, read books. A list of resources can be found [here](#). Do your work so as not to remain misinformed about the topic. You do not have to be an expert but put yourself in a better position to have dialogue.

CREATE A SAFE SPACE

To get started leaders must create a SAFE SPACE to communicate on such a sensitive topic. What is a safe space? Psychological safety is being able to act without fear of negative consequences or being judged. Guidelines should be established at the outset. For example, we will commit to not interrupting when someone else is speaking.

STATE YOUR INTENTION

What is the goal of the conversation? Hint – it should be learning BEFORE you can begin the conversation about any solutions. Being curious is a way to look at things from another perspective. You are looking for ways to expand your perspective – not judge, evaluate or criticize.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Everyone wants to be heard, valued, and acknowledged. When people feel overlooked and dismissed like they don't matter it's damaging to the relationship. When people feel marginalized, they don't perform as well. Acknowledge each person as having valuable and BEING valuable.

A SINCERE APOLOGY

This only works if you mean it. Saying, "I'm sorry for what you've been through" goes a long way. You're stating indirectly that "I see you" and "you matter". If this isn't done with sincerity it diminishes the impact and will be reviewed as just words – making the interaction more hostile and damaging a relationship.

SEEK FIRST TO UNDERSTAND RATHER THAN TO BE UNDERSTOOD

Learn about the lives of others. This is NOT the time to share your experiences. This moment is not about non-whites, its about black people. It is not a time to compare experiences of when you've been mistreated or discriminated against. It is a time to listen. Be a heart with ears and have an open mind free of judgement. This is a time to build [trust](#).

BE EMPATHETIC

When you hear someone talk you analyze their words from your perspective. It's important to remember that we're all unique with different backgrounds and experiences. To be empathetic is to put on someone else's shoes and walk in them for a while. Not just try them on. Being empathetic requires being emotionally and personally invested in someone else.

RECOGNIZE YOUR OWN BIAS

Confronting your own bias is uncomfortable. Implicit bias is our "blind spots" that shape our behavior, thoughts, and attitudes. They are often hidden from us and often surface when we are challenged or

introduced to new information that goes against our beliefs. Relationships are somewhat like mirrors that show us what's inside of us. Do not defend the bias, take action to confront what needs to change.

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BE HONEST

Being honest means being truthful with yourself. Being vulnerable is not a sign of weakness. In leadership vulnerability is a strength. If you’ve never had experience with racism, it’s okay to admit what you don’t know. Pride has to be set aside in order to create safe spaces for learning and discussions on racism.

**THE GOAL OF DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS IS TO BREAK DOWN THE BARRIERS TO RELATIONSHIPS AND NOT
TURN A BLIND EYE TO RACE & DIVERSITY**

Prepared by Tracy Y Washington
Leadership Engagement Consultant, Speaker & Coach
www.GetRelationshipCurrency.com
Tracy@GetRelationshipCurrency.com
(888)715-9977

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