

Candid Conversations: Discussing Race Relations in the Workplace

Over the past few years, there has been heightened awareness of and increased discussions around diversity and inclusion in the workplace. Diversity of every kind – race, ethnicity, color, sexual orientation, and socio-economic background – fosters an environment of innovation, creativity and inclusiveness. This document puts a focus on immediate communications around race relations as it relates to current events, however establishing or refining a holistic, longer term strategy addressing diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) within your organization will be critical to your company's continued growth.

As we navigate this time of racial injustices and civil unrest, communications are more critical than ever. Business leaders around the world need to move beyond the jargon and take meaningful action, using their power, platforms and resources to help employees and communities come together and thrive.

Initial Communications

01 Respond with Empathy, Honesty and an Openness to Learn

While words alone won't right the racial injustices in America, they are a critical place to start for companies and business leaders. Statements should:

Specifically reference the horrifying events leading up to the protests and clearly denounce them (be careful not to confuse protests with riots).

Not be defensive or make sweeping generalizations. There's no need to make statements explicitly political.

Show empathy and be authentic. Don't be afraid to address shortcomings specific to the organization with a promise to make meaningful changes. If D&I hasn't been a priority previously, acknowledge it, then detail how you will improve in the future.

02 Prioritize Your Employees

Before making any formal statements, be sure to immediately acknowledge and engage with your employees. Consider utilizing a phone tree via managers to do this personally and efficiently. Recognize the physical, mental and emotional toll that these events may have on workers, especially Black employees. Any formal communications and statements should show ongoing concern for the employee base and offer a safe outlet for release and discussion, such as a forum.

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03 **Communications are Not One Size Fits All**

As you plan to make a statement, consider the size of the company and resources available to support ongoing communications efforts. Consider leveraging CEO statements both internally and externally. Make sure to address communities that are tied to the organization, i.e. where you have offices, or if you serve clients or constituents who have been particularly impacted.

04 **Be Aware of the News Cycle & Pause Proactive Media as Necessary**

As protests around racial injustice continue, it's important to regularly assess the evolving media landscape and understand that corporate announcements, proactive media engagement, social media outreach and advertising may need to be temporarily paused or adjusted.

05 **Revisit Pride Month**

For any previously planned initiatives around June's Pride Month, it's important to revisit strategies and ensure they are inclusive through the current lens. For example, Pride activities should consider the additional challenges around the intersectionality of LGBTQ people of color. Stay informed of what's happening within the community and adjust programming accordingly to ensure its appropriate and effective.

Four Things You Shouldn't Do

01 **Stay Silent**

The biggest risk is staying silent. Employees, customers, clients, and the broader community expect and need your support. Silence is the opposite of good leadership.

02 **Business as Usual**

Downplaying the impact of these events while proceeding with "business as usual" activities will lower morale and potentially negatively impact the mental health of your employees. It also opens you up to criticism from external stakeholders.

03 **Volunteer Black Employees**

Leaders are responsible, with support from the HR and communications teams, for creating safe and open forums for discussion and to provide educational resources. It is not the responsibility of your Black employees to share or get involved unless they volunteer.

04 **End the Conversation**

You've taken the necessary step of addressing racism and establishing a path to anti-racism in your organization. Now it is time to talk about the future. What actions will you take and what policies will you address to drive lasting change?

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Listen & Learn From Your Peers

Below are a few media resources that share useful information on how companies can and should be held accountable for diversity, to help guide current and ongoing actions.



Mellody Hobson, co-CEO and CIO of Ariel Investments, spoke to Andrew Ross Sorkin about corporate America needing to step up and make diversity a priority, rather than a target. She asserted that CEOs have reached the top of the corporate ladder by producing results and that it's crucial for that same determination be turned toward achieving and supporting diversity.



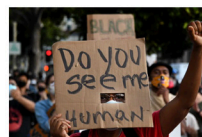
Mona Naqvi, head of ESG product strategy at S&P Dow Jones Indices, said company actions around the ongoing protests, including internal and external communications and activities, will impact ESG scores as those actions are crucial for building good will in times of stress, and diversity is a key factor. She said that company convictions when speaking out are indicative of how deeply they are dedicated to ESG and corporate values.



Business school professors Laura Morgan Roberts of UVA and Ella Washington of Georgetown published a piece in Harvard Business Review urging businesses to take meaningful action against racism and inequality. They recommend that executives communicate with employees by acknowledging their experiences, affirming the right to feel safe and protected, and thinking critically about the steps each company must take to address their shortcomings. They also advise companies to avoid missteps including staying silent, becoming defensive and overgeneralizing.

RaceAhead

74 pages



NEWSLETTERS
Citigroup, Netflix, and Microsoft among companies making statements in support of Black lives and justice



NEWSLETTERS
The officer involved in George Floyd's death is arrested
BY ELLEN MCGIRT
MAY 26, 2020



NEWSLETTERS
A tale of two Coopers, one as old as the nation
BY ELLEN MCGIRT
MAY 26, 2020

The Fortune RaceAhead Newsletter, launched in 2019, focuses on diversity and inclusion in corporate America. This resource helps readers stay up to date on news and issues important to businesses striving to improve their D&I efforts.

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Turning Short-Term Momentum into Long-Term Action

Efforts on having candid conversations and taking action should not stop with race. Developing a holistic DEI strategy will be a critical factor in a company's long-term business resilience and sustainability. You don't need to have all the answers right now, but you do need to clearly state your stance, current actions and commitment to continue to activate over the long-term, and report on progress.

01 Immediate Call to Action

Whether it's a donation, hosting internal forums for employees, or partnering with an organization dedicated to ending racial injustice in the U.S., this needs to be outlined and clearly and continuously communicated both internally and externally.

02 Conduct a Cultural X-Ray

Leaders should take action to better understand their company's strengths, weaknesses, successes and challenges, as it relates to culture, employee engagement, talent acquisitions, diversity and belonging, by engaging with and listening to employees at all levels through a D&I survey, open forums and 1-1 conversations.

03 Create a Tailored Plan

The cultural x-ray will provide guidance and a strong foundation for a tailored culture and diversity plan, as well as a process on how to inform real action. From improving recruitment practices to implementing additional training or launching a new committee to strategize D&I initiatives, actions should be unique to an organization's needs and measurable.

04 Continuous Communication

This is not a one and done situation. While the first step is denouncing recent events, companies need to continue to communicate with employees, key stakeholders and the public around ongoing efforts and support. This is vital to ensure that employees and all stakeholders know this is real, and not just a corporate agenda. It also holds leaders accountable for their actions and encourages all employees to be part of the change.