



MASTERING CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Expert Strategies for Creating Diverse, Equitable,
and Inclusive Organizations

Why We Need to Have Much-Needed Conversations About Race in the Workplace

Race is one of those topics that have long been considered taboo.

Even among friends, these conversations can be particularly difficult and anxiety-provoking.

Individuals often fear saying the wrong thing, being labeled a racist, or being perceived as insensitive or ignorant.

No wonder saying nothing seems to be the default mode for many.

Janine Truitt, Chief Innovation Officer of Talent Think Innovation, LLC, a business strategy and management consulting firm contends that,

for most people, having a discussion about race relations is the equivalent of standing in a public place with twenty people where there is a remarkable stench, but no one wants to be the one to say aloud that the room stinks. Talking about race stinks, *but it has to be done* (2014).

Because of all the recent events we have witnessed in our society such as fatal police shootings of unarmed black men and senseless mass killings, we walk into the workplace still carrying the emotions associated with these tragedies.

Yet, employees are often unable to talk about them in an open manner.

This culture of silence around racial and other inequities and its impact is often reinforced because it has been ingrained into our collective psyches that the workplace is not an appropriate place for these conversations.

The problem with this mindset is that silence can be interpreted in many different ways, including indifference or acquiescence.

As a society, we need to have a better understanding of the impact these events have on somebody's life and accept that the impact of these issues follows us into our workplaces.

To leave the emotions these events provoke at the door is unrealistic.

It is time for companies to start adding to their training curricula the necessary steps for creating a culture where racism will be addressed in a systematic manner.

While this will be uncomfortable for many, think of the tremendous impact that the insensitive jokes, the racially charged emails, or the comments many employees of color hear implying they were only hired so the company could reach numeric benchmarks.

More than ever, we need safe spaces where employees can come together to share their experiences and concerns, share their stories, discuss the events that are dominating their world outside the organization, and understand each other's perspective.

These conversations cannot happen as isolated events but as the beginning of a journey for all within the organization.

More importantly, those leading these conversations need skills. And becoming a skilled facilitator of racial dialogues takes time, effort, and continued development.

What to Consider When Facilitating Race-Related Conversations in the Workplace

As a facilitator, you need to:

1. Have a deeper understanding of the concepts of race and racism and how these terms have evolved.
2. Understand how racism is perpetuated.
3. Ensure an environment where conversations about race and racism are no longer taboo.
4. Recognize how biases and privilege will inevitably influence the conversation.
5. Ensure your organization is ready to have such conversations (see next segment).

How do You Know If Your Organization is Ready?

In addition to ensuring organizations have individuals with the necessary knowledge and skills to address race conversations in the workplace, it is equally essential that the organization demonstrates the same level of readiness.

Only those companies with noticeable evidence that they truly value DEI are ready to address climate issues in the workplace.

Experts agree that the following are good indicators of DEI organization readiness:

1. DEI goals are clearly articulated, and results are used both to guide action planning and to set a baseline for assessing progress.
2. Creating a diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment for all needs to be part of the company's long-term strategic plan. The ultimate goal should be long-term climate change in the organization.
3. Leaders are held accountable and evaluated on their efforts to advance DEI in the organization.
4. Policies are reviewed annually to assess effectiveness toward DEI.
5. All employees feel valued and respected and feel they can bring their authentic selves to work. In other words, no significant parts of their identity have to remain "hidden."
6. There are formal programs in place to promote an equitable and inclusive environment for all such as mentoring, professional development opportunities, employee network groups, etc.
7. The organization celebrates diversity through different company-sponsored events.
8. There is openness to suggestions from people at all levels in the organization.
9. The services provided by the company reflect an awareness of an increasingly diverse population.
10. The company is vested in finding creative ways to attract top talent from diverse groups.
11. All segments of the population are represented at the top level of the organization.
12. Variety in dress and grooming is accepted.
13. There is sensitivity to and awareness of different religious and ethnic holidays and cultures.
14. The organization has a practice of addressing the proverbial elephant in the room.

15. The selection of food and refreshments at department-sponsored functions considers religious and personal preferences.
16. Flexibility exists to accommodate personal responsibilities outside the job.
17. The organization actively supports philanthropic causes of diverse groups.
18. There are trained dialogue facilitators within the company to support employee development and address personal concerns or any inequity issues that arise.
19. There is a deliberate move away from isolated training. Instead, the organization nurtures an environment that encourages *regular and consistent* discussions about race equity—even if these conversations are difficult to navigate and are certain to provoke anxiety and discomfort.
20. Organizations are proactive instead of waiting for a crisis to emerge. In fact, they ensure there are regular opportunities for employees to talk about race-related incidents and how they are impacted by them. They establish ground rules for these conversations so that employees feel safe about sharing their personal information without retaliation.
21. Lastly, there is a sense that climate change is everyone’s responsibility, and everyone needs to be involved. Putting the weight of DEI efforts in a single department signals those issues aren’t priorities, and therefore, easier to avoid.

Mastering Cultural Differences offers a two-hour workshop on facilitating difficult conversations and how to react in a productive manner when you are called a racist.

To schedule a consultation about bringing this or other workshops to your organization, [<click here>](#).