

Hone

How to Build an Anti-Racist Workplace

A guide to addressing racism and bias
for leaders and organizations



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Foreword

How can leaders and organizations address racism and bias in the workplace?

Racism can be found in every corner of the world and has permeated not only our personal lives but also the modern workplace. Thanks to calls for change like the Black Lives Matter movement, companies are paying more attention than ever before. Still, there's a lot of work that has to be done. The work of creating a workplace where diversity, inclusion, and equity are embraced and all employees can thrive certainly does not happen overnight.

We sat down with diversity, equality, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) experts to discuss the state of racism in the modern workplace and what companies can do to create an anti-racist culture where everybody feels they belong and can thrive. This book is written based on conversations with Dominique Hollins, Alexandria Butler, Lily Zheng, Karen Fleshman, and Jared Karol. These DEIB experts shared their own experiences dealing with racism and their current work to address racism and bias in the workplace. From these examples, we share actionable takeaways every people manager can use to be an ally and advocate for minority voices and career development in the workplace.

As we'll learn, change starts at the individual level. It starts by having conversations; listening to others' points of view, being vulnerable and open, and leading with empathy. To do this successfully, we must **be present, focused, and open to feedback**. As we build deeper awareness about our own blind spots and begin to take responsibility for how we show up as allies, we can impact and empower those around us. The path forward is certainly not linear, and we will all make mistakes. Those who continue to step up to the plate and put their best foot forward with conviction will emerge as the leaders of our modern workplace.



Sam Levine

Director of Learning Experience

Chapter 01

Racism in the Modern Workplace

Over the past 15 years, companies have started to make statements based on the principles of diversity and inclusion. These statements are written into their mission statements, affirmed in public discourse, and often championed by committees focused on DEIB in the workplace. Although these types of statements are certainly positive changes toward addressing racism and inequality in the workplace, are they enough?

In short, the answer is a resounding “no.” To truly create change and improve DEIB in the modern workplace, companies need to go further. They must actively invest in the **recruitment, retention, and upward mobility** of diverse talent. Viewed through this lens, statements made around DEIB are often empty, and the numbers don’t lie.

For example, in 2020, among all Fortune 500 companies, you could count the number of black CEOs on one hand: **four**. Not only are companies not hiring diverse talent, but minorities have a harder time climbing the corporate ladder. In some cases, companies do succeed in hiring for diversity, but then find that their diverse employees struggle to thrive in a work system that often unconsciously favors racist processes and policies. In many cases, they end up leaving the companies, making it even harder to prioritize the upward mobility of diverse individuals.



“While hiring is always a topic for discussion, there aren’t enough conversations around companies retaining diverse talent.”

- ALEXANDRIA BUTLER

These issues often stem from a fundamental lack of mentorship and sponsorship opportunities which, when paired with unconscious bias, can keep deserving individuals from getting promoted and climbing the corporate ladder.

The company then suffers when they lose out on having these diverse voices and perspectives in positions of influence.

Transforming the workplace has to be about more than just the diversity of our entry-level employees. We must focus on the upward mobility of diverse employees within every level of our organizations to affect meaningful change.

Chapter 02

The Difference Makers

It may surprise you to find out that the people within organizations that can make a sizable difference in DEIB program effectiveness are not C-suite executives. In the end, it's middle management who are the real difference-makers. While the CEO sets the vision and high-level goals of the organization, those goals aren't executed without the help of middle management. They're the ones running the day-to-day. They drive results and they have the power, resources, and influence to call-out injustice, advocate for their direct reports, and build a work environment where every employee feels respected and valued.

People leave managers, not companies. Managers set the behavioral tone for the entire team. If they're engaged in micro-aggressions, leading with bias, or perpetuating unfairness, employees will get fed up and leave. Other times, it is other team members who perpetuate harmful behaviors. When a manager allows that sort of disruptive behavior to continue, it sends a message to employees that they don't care. Good managers need to advocate for every one of their employees and speak out against injustice wherever they see it.

What are Microaggressions?

Microaggressions are small behaviors - intentional or not, that further marginalize minority groups. These can range from insensitive comments, inappropriate jokes, or behaviors that communicate some sort of bias. In many cases, the people who are committing the microaggressions aren't even aware that their behaviors are communicating some form of bias.

Middle managers make all the difference, yet are often left out of leadership training. All people managers should be required to complete rigorous training courses on how to create a culture of inclusion, address bias and microaggressions on their team, deliver compassionate and corrective feedback, and cultivate behaviors of belonging on their team. Middle managers should also be held accountable to ensure they're amplifying the voices and the representation of people of color. People managers can meet individually with the most marginalized people on their team and say, "Your experience here is extremely important to me. What can I do to support you? Are there any problems that I should be aware of?" By being vulnerable and candid, the manager communicates that they are looking out for their employees, willing to stand up on their behalf, and work to build a safe workplace environment.



Chapter 03

Amplifying Voices

“If you touch a person as a part of your role, it is mandatory that you not only go through training, but that you are also amplifying the voices and the representation of people of color.”

- DOMINIQUE HOLLINS

Employee resource groups (ERGs) are a fantastic way to bring like-minded individuals together. These employee-led groups can provide a safe space to discuss challenges and amplify minority voices in the workplace. Sometimes, they are also tasked with building and executing DEIB initiatives for their companies. While this may seem sensible, adding an additional burden to a volunteer group can actually further marginalize an already marginalized group.

ERG members volunteer their time to host events, lead discussions, mentor colleagues, and more, all on top of their already demanding jobs. In almost all cases, they're doing all of that extra work for free - extra work that could become a barrier to exceeding expectations within their current role and become a negative factor for receiving a promotion during the next performance cycle. Remember that your ERG members are volunteers and should receive credit and compensation for the important work that they are doing.

Another approach to amplifying minority voices is to create a working group or a cross-functional team with representation from people leaders of color and others on your teams with influence within the organization.



This team might operate in addition to the foundational diversity and inclusion work your company needs to do to infuse these principles into recruiting, employee development and retention. Because being a part of this cross-functional group is an explicit part of their jobs, they can be more readily compensated for it. This formalizes the role of people of color leading this sort of work and allows them to get compensated for their efforts.



“We need leadership teams composed of the most marginalized people in the workplace. Change is not going to come from white leadership pushing down an anti-racist agenda. It has to come from people who are the most impacted people. They are the closest to the problem and therefore closest to the solution.”

- KAREN FLESHMAN

Finally, make sure these teams have the power, resources, and budget to make decisions and drive change within the organization. Too often these types of task forces are ineffective at driving real change because they lack the support or internal political capital to make a difference.

Chapter 04

“Do No Harm” vs. “Anti-Racist”

“The beauty of anti-racism is that you don’t have to pretend to be free of racism to be an anti-racist. Anti-racism is the commitment to fight racism wherever you find it, including in yourself. And it’s the only way forward.”

- IJEOMA OLUO, Bestselling Author,
So You Want to Talk About Race

When considering your DEIB programs, you should strive to build an anti-racist workplace instead of a “do no harm” workplace. A “do no harm” company is one that just checks the box when it comes to diversity. They might have a Diversity and Inclusion Officer, ERGs, and be outspoken in their commitment to DEIB, but their commitments and initiatives might be mostly empty promises. DEIB commitments don’t mean much if the company doesn’t have the results that show the change they are enacting in their own workplace and larger community.



An “anti-racist” company, by comparison, goes a step further to dismantle the inequities within workplaces by truly prioritizing anti-racist policies and behaviors within team and organizational structure.

What does this mean from a people perspective? If you talk to people of color in predominantly white spaces, you will find out that many of them are not experiencing active racism from the company, but rather from the people they work with every day. For a manager, “doing no harm” might mean being aware that a black female employee might experience certain prejudice or targeted behaviors in the workplace, yet doing nothing to help or change that. Sometimes managers assume that because they are not the ones saying or doing something to make an employee feel uncomfortable, then everything is fine. The truth is that they aren’t doing enough. An anti-racist manager call out racist behavior and takes action to ensure it does not happen again.

“In-action is an action. By doing nothing, you are perpetuating racist behavior and become a part of the problem.”

- DOMINIQUE HOLLINS

Being an anti-racist workplace extends beyond company values and having good managers, it includes every aspect of the company's operations—from what it produces, what vendors it uses, how it shows up for the community, and what it invests in. An anti-racist workplace should be transparent to the public about all of this and acknowledge the DEIB work that still needs to get done by sharing a plan of what they're going to do to change and hold themselves accountable to these type of changes.

Chapter 05

Vulnerability and Commitment

Stepping up as an anti-racist starts with vulnerably admitting to what we do not know and actively working to deepen our awareness and take responsibility for how we show up as allies. It is simply too easy for corporate leadership to issue a well-crafted, ambiguous statement and just “check a box.” Executives must be willing to come out and say, “Hey, this isn't my area of expertise, but it's important. I've made some mistakes in the past and here's what I'm learning. Here's who I'm talking to. Here's what I'm doing now.” Vulnerability from leadership inspires the rest of the organization to be more open.



“For folks who've been living this life of privilege and unawareness, you have to start thinking about why you're not understanding what all the fuss is. You have to do that self-reflection and realize what barriers existed for others in life that didn't for you. Your story might be a non-story.”

- JARED KAROL



How do you know if you've succeeded in becoming an anti-racist company?

The benchmark is rather shocking; according to Lily Zheng, “unless every white supremacist in the world hates your company then you need to try to push a little bit harder to become anti-racist.” You should strive to become such a strong example of an anti-racist workplace that groups that perpetuate hate despise your company and the way you treat your employees.

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The winds are changing. People want individuals and companies to do more and take a stand on big social issues like racism, sexism, inequality, and injustice. Don't be afraid to go bold because that's the direction our country is moving in. We have an enormous opportunity right now, so go big, go bold.

Say the things that are hard to say—you'll find that more people support you than you think.

- LILY ZHENG

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Chapter 06

Hiring and Recruiting

Building a diverse candidate pipeline should be central to hiring and recruiting efforts. Sometimes this comes at odds with the usual recruiting process where speed is valued above all other metrics. The problem with this, of course, is that the usual recruiting process may be loaded with implicit biases. Recruiters and hiring managers have the power to re-think their company's hiring practices and be agents of change within their organizations.

Hiring managers can bring more diversity to the workplace in several important ways:

1. They can partner with universities that have large minority populations to supplement typical campus recruiting.
2. They can get training on unconscious bias so they recognize their own biases in the process.
3. They can use tools to reduce the likelihood that bias is inserted into the hiring process.

a) For example, one piece of software automatically hides candidate's names from their resumes, as studies show that these applicants get fewer callbacks than similar applicants with white-sounding names.

Recruiters are under immense pressure to deliver high-performing candidates to hiring managers ASAP; however, that often does not allow for enough time to build a diverse pool of candidates. Organizations who want to change the status quo need to be willing to embrace the upfront time and effort it takes to find and successfully recruit diverse candidates.

Job descriptions can also play a role in reducing the diversity of candidates who apply for a role. Most of the time, applicants actually don't need to be able to do a vast majority of the skills and experience outlined in the job description to do that job well. **Studies show** that men are more likely to apply to a job even if they only meet two of the ten criteria listed in a job description. Women and

minorities, on the other hand, are more likely to screen themselves out of the process. They are less likely to apply to a listing if they don't meet most or all of the listed criteria.

“A black woman like myself knows that if there are 10 bullet points on a job description, I have to have 20 when in actual fact there are only five bullet points that are needed to be successful in this role.”

- ALEXANDRIA BUTLER

Hiring managers and recruiters need to figure out what skills and experience a candidate really needs in order to perform a job successfully. For example, does this role really require a Bachelor's degree? That requirement may eliminate a lot of qualified folks from your hiring process.



Chapter 07

Investing in Employee Growth and Development

One crucial way that managers can take active steps to combat racism in the workplace is by sharing constructive feedback with their employees and investing in their professional development and goals. This is a step beyond discussing work status updates in weekly one-on-ones. Instead, they can encourage

their teams to improve their skills and achieve their career goals, while advocating for them along the way.

A huge part of the manager-direct report relationship lies in giving and receiving timely feedback. If managers aren't comfortable giving feedback to certain employees throughout the year, then drop negative feedback out of nowhere on them during annual reviews, they can undermine that employee's growth and jeopardize their ability to get a raise or a promotion. At the same time, employees who do receive timely feedback throughout the year receive an unfair advantage: they were made aware of opportunities for growth and given the time to act on that feedback. Managers must give every employee an equal opportunity to grow and provide consistent feedback to all of their employees regularly.

“It’s on you as a manager to overcome whatever is making you feel uncomfortable giving one employee that feedback so all your direct reports have the opportunity to grow.”

- KAREN FLESHMAN

Finally, there is the issue of pay equity. There’s always time to review the salaries of your employees to ensure that they are being paid at the market rate. Ensure your employ-

ees are paid equally and fairly, regardless of gender, race, age, sexuality, etc. Don’t increase an employee’s salary only when the employee realizes they’re being underpaid and voices their concern.

Every company should perform a pay equity audit and make sure that everyone in the company is being paid their worth. That is active anti-racism—identifying a problem, making a commitment to change it, and then taking action.

Conclusion

Change starts at the individual level, and we can all start making a difference today. Managers have the power, influence, and resources to influence change and influence workplace culture - starting with their own personal and professional relationships and policies on their teams. Make a vow to stand up for what’s right and be the change you want to see in the world and the workplace.



Guest Contributors



Alexandria Butler

Alexandria Noel Butler, affectionately known as Lexi B, is considered one of Silicon Valley's candid and prominent voices. Her thought-provoking advice and opinions on how to create a more equitable work environment stem from her own experiences working in some of the most popular tech companies. In April 2017, Lexi B founded Sista Circle: Black Women in Tech, a community that supports Black women in tech companies and tech-related professions. This 6300+ international community has partnered with organizations such as Phenomenally, Instagram, Youtube, LinkedIn and Slack. Lexi's main mission is to inspire people to create their desired life journey by understanding their purpose and life goals.



Lily Zheng

Lily Zheng is a diversity, equity & inclusion consultant and executive coach who works with organizations around the world to create high-impact and sustainable change. With her clients, she leverages organizational design, strategy, and culture to find novel solutions to systemic inequalities. A dedicated change-maker and advocate recently named a Forbes D&I Trailblazer, Lily writes for publications including the Harvard Business Review, Quartz at Work, and HR Executive, and is the co-author of two books.



Karen Fleshman

Karen Fleshman is a single soccer mom, mentor, activist, entrepreneur, attorney, author, educator, proud San Franciscan, and a role model for white women. In 2014, she founded **Racy Conversations**, a workplace workshop facilitation company, to inspire the antiracist generation. Her first book *White Women We Need to Talk: Doing Our Part to End Racism*, will be published by Sounds True in 2021 and is available for preorder [here](#).



Jared Karol

With over twenty years' experience as a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) leader, Jared is a sought-after professional speaker, panel moderator, workshop facilitator, writer, and leadership coach. Using his accessible and authentic storytelling approach rooted in empathy, curiosity, vulnerability, mindfulness, and self-development principles, Jared has inspired and influenced thousands of groups and individuals—from interns to executives—across the corporate, startup, nonprofit, and social impact sectors.



Dominique Hollins

Dominique Hollins is a Hone facilitator, business operations leader and a workplace equity expert. With over 12 years of experience in the technology and financial services industries, she has provided guidance and coaching to executive leaders and professionals within North America, Germany, and the United Kingdom. Dominique has worked at Google, eBay, is the co-founder of Our Collective in partnership with the Kapor Center and is the Founder and CEO of WÊ360, a workplace equity consulting firm. Dominique was recently inducted in the 2019 class of Fortune's Most Powerful Women Next Gen and is dedicated to personal and professional growth through human connection.

About Hone

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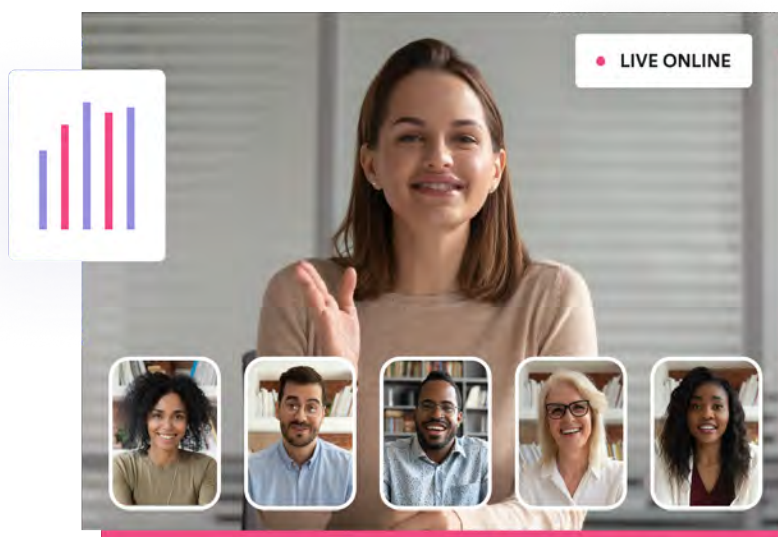
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