



Practical Steps for Boards and Companies in Addressing Racial Inequality and Injustice

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As companies are grappling with the issues of racial inequality and injustice – on top of the health and economic crises brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic – The Conference Board is providing a set of resources to help companies understand our collective challenge to implement sustained and systemic changes.

Here are a few takeaways from what we're hearing from our members that, we hope, will help provide a springboard for discussions that transform ideas into concrete actions.

- ***Be prepared to talk with – and engage – your board on racism***, especially at consumer-facing companies. Don't be afraid to ask your board for advice or to ask board members to meet directly with employees on this topic.
- ***Executive leadership is key***. CEO leadership and visibility are critical. But it's important to engage the entire C-suite and other business leaders.
- ***Consider holding “courageous conversations”*** where you can hear first-hand stories from employees at all levels. Companies sometimes have been hesitant to have such discussions because they can raise the specter of workplace discrimination claims. But that may well be a risk worth taking – and one that can be mitigated by ensuring you have a robust system in place to investigate any issues that come up.
- ***Be prepared for a sustained, broad-based effort***. After the initial statements, it's a good idea to pause to think more deeply and broadly about what the company can do. Companies can have a direct impact through their workforce and workplace

policies, as well as through their corporate citizenship efforts. But they can also have a broad and lasting impact through their business investment decisions, how they produce and distribute their products and services, and the public policy stands they take that go beyond the company's immediate economic interests.

- ***Be sensitive to other diversity imperatives, but there's no need to dilute the company's efforts.*** It's important to acknowledge the multiple forms of discrimination that take place, but there's a singular opportunity to address discrimination against African-Americans, which can help serve as a catalyst for all of a company's Inclusion efforts.
- ***When in engaging open dialogues, realize emotions are raw.*** While some African American employees may be willing to participate in discussions, some may not. "Story sessions" may be educational or eye-opening for white employees, but they can be traumatic for employees to relive these experiences. When driving open and honest dialogue, respect each individual employee's wishes and emphasize the purpose of getting together is discussion (not debate or disagreement) and charting a course for future action. It can also be very helpful to end discussions by asking "what do people hope for?"
- ***Bring knowledge, ideas, and assets back to communities.*** Companies run a risk if they make a one-off donation and then seek support in time of crisis. As our [recent blog post](#) explained, effective community relations requires one foot in the company and one foot in the community; and to serve both well, companies cannot step in and out as needed. So that means a sustained dialogue with local communities where companies have their operations, involving business leaders at the company as well as community relations specialists.
- ***Use your intranet as a hub for compiling tools and resources about how to discuss race in the workplace.*** By enabling people, information, and processes to come together, your intranet provides employees access to more tools and information. Additionally, as part of the digital workplace, an intranet is a great platform for sharing information and highlighting important key Inclusion policies.
- ***Consider encouraging Employee Resource (or Affinity) Groups to invite others to their gatherings.*** This is a time when we're "all in it together," and encouraging ERGs to invite others to participate in their discussions can help increase understanding.
- ***Take a closer look at your policies and performance in recruitment and promotion.*** Many companies may recruit from Historically Black College and Universities (HBCUs) and Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), but how many acceptances do you get and how long do the employees stay? Companies may also

require a diverse slate for open positions, but do they have ways of making sure that the drive for diversity isn't just a formality, but understood as a business benefit?

On our [new hub](#), you'll find a series of interviews with CEOs and other leaders on [Building a More Civil and Just Society](#). These candid discussions address core issues such as economic opportunity, childhood education, health care, workforce skills development, workplace equality, and the role of public companies in society. You'll also find other valuable content such as a recent webcast: [Creating Space for Race-Based Discussions in the Workplace](#), must-watch viewing as companies are undertaking the process of holding, often for the first time, "courageous conversations" about race.

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