EASING RACIAL TENSIONS AT WORK

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HOW WE CONDUCTED OUR STUDY

The research consists of a survey, Insights In-Depth® sessions (a proprietary web-based tool used to conduct voice-facilitated virtual focus groups) involving ninety-seven people from our Task Force organizations, and one-on-one interviews with forty-four men and women in the US.

The national survey was conducted online or over the phone in October and November 2016 among 3,570 respondents (374 black, 2258 white, 393 Asian, and 395 Hispanic) between the ages of twenty-one and sixty-five currently employed full-time in white collar occupations, with at least a bachelor's degree. Data were weighted to be representative of the US population on key demographics (age, sex, education, race/ethnicity, and Census Division). The base used for statistical testing was the effective base.

The survey was conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago under the auspices of the Center for Talent Innovation (CTI), a nonprofit research organization. NORC was responsible for the data collection, while CTI conducted the analysis.

In the charts, percentages may not always add up to 100 because of computer rounding or the acceptance of multiple responses from respondents.

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FOREWORD

In the summer of 2016, as a string of violent events exacerbated racial tension in communities across America, I sent an anguished letter to our Task Force community (see the appendix). The response was extraordinary. I heard back from 63 senior executives from companies across industry sectors. They felt, as we did, that silence was not an option. We convened these executives by phone in July (by then the number had grown to seventy-seven) to learn how their organizations had already responded to external incidents of racial violence in the US, and to discuss ways to foment productive, healing conversations among their employees. By October, when nearly 50 of us met at Time Warner Center in New York, next steps were clear: CTI would undertake research to quantify not only the costs of silence, but also the benefits of talking about race at work. Because the workplace, as our executives perceived, may be the only place where we routinely encounter and come to rely upon people unlike ourselves, it is possibly the best place to start a national conversation on race relations.

This report is both the culmination of those meetings and the outgrowth of our long-term relationships with Task Force members, who ensure that the research we undertake addresses their most salient issues. It reflects their input and feedback. It also showcases their field-tested guidance on how to initiate, sustain, and leverage conversations about race, because they recognize the vital role they play in building better working relationships.

But for all the input of our Task Force, I must clarify that this is a CTI report: it is our lens on the data, and our interpretation of the findings. We take seriously our mandate to provide thought leadership, even when—especially when—the topic is as sensitive and emotionally freighted as race relations. If easing racial tension at work begins with a conversation, let us be the ones to frame it.

Sylvia Ann Hewlett
IN THE US, TENSIONS AROUND RACE AND ETHNICITY ARE NOTHING NEW. But the fault lines in our citizenry are newly visible, in ways we cannot ignore. They feature in campaign slogans and executive orders, in Twitter feeds and Instagram posts, on the nightly news and throughout the blogosphere. We are a nation divided.

Tensions between Latinos\(^1\) and non-Latinos have grown in lockstep with resentment of undocumented workers.\(^2\) Fear of Muslims by non-Muslims, which has grown with every terrorist attack and immigration order, dominated the 2016 presidential campaign and helped deliver Donald Trump to office.\(^3\) Also present in the election, and thrown into starkest relief by ongoing protests, riots, and lethal encounters between black citizens and law enforcement, is the disenfranchisement that blacks feel as incarceration rates remain disproportionate, the inequality gap widens, and voting rights erode.\(^4\)
Fault lines are newly visible

“After my election there was talk of a post-racial America. Such a vision, however well-intended, was never realistic. Race remains a potent and often divisive force in our society.”
—Barack Obama, Former US President

“In the face of a social crisis unmatched in their recent memory, poor whites have been confronted with a confusing and alarming idea: that they are the privileged ones.”
—J.D. Vance, Author, *Hillbilly Elegy*

“We want to believe racism is an artifact of the past, and if you have a political massacre [as we did in Charleston, SC], that contradicts that.”
—Ta-Nehisi Coates, Author, *Between the World and Me*

“We have a situation where we have our inner cities, African Americans, Hispanics are living in hell because it’s so dangerous. You walk down the street, you get shot.”
—Donald Trump, US President

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“RACE RELATIONS AFFECT EMPLOYEES—AND EMPLOYERS
PAINFUL RACIAL TENSIONS DIVIDE AMERICANS

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Travis Wise / CC BY
Beverly Yuen Thompson / CC BY
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Americans see race relations worsening

POLL AFTER POLL confirms that Americans perceive race relations to be bad and getting worse—particularly between blacks and whites. Shootings of young black men and tensions stirred up in the aftermath of the election have contributed to this tension.

Polls conducted by other organizations echo these findings:

Would you say race relations (between whites and blacks) are very good, somewhat good, somewhat bad, or very bad?
We are a segregated nation

SOME IMPEDIMENTS to improving race relations are structural. Groups of black, Latino, Asian, and white Americans rarely socialize together, thwarting interactions that might lead to greater understanding. Segregation makes it easier for Americans to be unaware of the stubborn obstacles to equal civil rights for citizens of color. The workplace is one of few settings where we commonly interact across racial and ethnic lines. This is particularly true in corporations, which strive to create a diverse workforce.

“We are a segregated nation”

“For most adult citizens, the single most likely site of integration — of genuine social interaction across racial lines — is the workplace.”

— Cynthia Estlund, author, Working Together: How Workplace Bonds Strengthen a Diverse Democracy

“We are a segregated nation”

“Unless you experience discrimination personally, or live in a community where [stop-and-frisk] is prominent, you can never understand. I only barely understand the impact of stop and frisk because a close friend works in a community where it’s prevalent, and his personal stories are what have touched me.”

— Asian/Pacific Islander female focus group participant

We don’t live together:

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We don’t socialize together:

![Image](#)

But we do work together:

Composition of new entrants to the US white-collar workforce

![Image](#)
The weekly news cycle, with its relentless inventory of racially motivated confrontation, injustice, and senseless tragedy, takes a toll on all of us. But for professionals who have experienced discrimination or bias firsthand, or whose family members are at elevated risk of encountering it, the headlines can trigger a tide of anxiety, fear, anger, and despair—emotions that they cannot check at the office door, that crowd their thoughts as they do their work and threaten to intrude on every encounter with co-workers. Yet conversations about race remain taboo at work.

Talking about race relations in the office won’t stop the violence outside of it. But coming to an understanding, as colleagues and coworkers, is a powerful first step toward narrowing our divisions. Positing that silence on race erodes the engagement and retention of diverse talent, we undertook to measure both the costs of silence and the benefits of conversation. In a large-scale nationally representative survey, anonymous online focus groups, and one-on-one interviews, we asked about experiences of bias and discrimination outside of work; whether employees feel comfortable talking about issues of race relations inside of work; and how unresolved or unacknowledged racial tension impacts their ability to engage with coworkers and bring their full selves to work.
Discrimination outside of work is rampant

Most professionals of color—blacks, Latinos, and Asians—have encountered discrimination outside of the workplace, or fear that they or a member of their family will. Black professionals, however, are the group most likely to experience discrimination or fear it.

Employees who have experienced discrimination/bias outside of work and/or are fearful of discrimination/bias/violence for themselves or family

- **BLACK**: 78%
- **WHITE**: 28%
- **ASIAN**: 52%
- **LATINO**: 50%

Hate crimes in 2015

- 57% of all hate crimes were Anti-Black
- 53% of all hate crimes were motivated by race or ethnicity

% of Americans who say too little attention is paid to race and racial issues in the US these days

- **BLACK AMERICANS**: 58%
- **WHITE AMERICANS**: 27%

“I’ve been followed by police in Akron, in Toledo, just for walking down the sidewalk.”

—Black male loan officer, Fort Mill, South Carolina

“One evening driving in Tallahassee I got lost, so I pulled into a gas station and asked the attendant if he knew the street I was looking for. He said, ‘Don’t get caught out here when the sun is down.’ I skipped out to my car and broke down in tears.”

—Black female attorney, Orlando, Florida
External discrimination carries painful consequences at work

When employees experience discrimination, they frequently bring those experiences with them to work. In interviews and focus groups, we heard time and again how difficult it is to check racial pain at the door when entering the workplace.

“I cannot check being a black woman at the door when entering the workplace. These social issues impact me. I have a young son, and how he engages with the police is a real concern—one that carries over into my morale and productivity at work.”
—Black female focus group participant

“My husband is in the police force. I see him put on his bullet proof vest every morning and I wonder if it’s the last time I’m going to see him. This tension impacts how I feel and my ability to concentrate at work.”
—White female communications manager, Somerset, Maryland

COLLATERAL DAMAGE

The morning after retaliatory shootings of five police officers in Dallas, Keith McClain, vice president and head of compensation for New York Life, seriously considered working from home. “I read the news, looked at my wife and my four-year-old daughter asleep in our bed, and thought: my family needs me more.” McClain eventually did brave the bus trip into Manhattan from his home in New Jersey, but found the scene concerning. In response to the shootings, Manhattan’s Port Authority bus terminal teemed with armed national guardsmen and armed police officers. “Those officers are there to make people feel safer, but they didn’t make me feel safer—not as a black man,” he explains. “I was afraid, that day. I was afraid because of what has happened historically and continues to happen.”
Perhaps because black professionals are disproportionately likely to experience discrimination or encounter bias outside the workplace, many of them express acute frustration at having to monitor their conversations with coworkers. Most non-black coworkers, interviewees told us, wouldn’t understand or might actively resent being reminded of racism at the hands of people like themselves. Uniformly, our black interviewees believed that speaking up about bias—whether experienced outside of work, or at work—could either hurt their prospects for promotion or deepen the divides they struggled to minimize with white coworkers.

“Technically, you’re ‘allowed’ to talk about your experience, but you have to be so careful. If you speak out it will be viewed in a negative fashion.”
—Black male focus group participant

“‘I’m the only person of color in my department. I fear being seen as the angry employee of color. No one feels they can do anything, so why bring it up?’”
—Black female focus group participant

“You have to walk on eggshells to make sure you don’t say or do anything to offend.”
—White male focus group participant

Nearly 2 out of 5 black employees feel it is never acceptable to talk about experiences of racial bias at work

It is never acceptable at my company to speak out about experiences of bias based on race

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<tr>
<td>White</td>
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PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION STIRS UP RACIAL TENSION; A SAFE DISCUSSION RELEASES SOME OF IT

CTI’s Insights In-Depth® sessions—anonymous focus groups we conducted online in the days following the presidential election of 2016—surfaced a potent strain of anxiety among black and white employees. Noting the “deafening silence” in their offices post-election, participants were grateful to have been invited to discuss race relations in the safe space of an anonymous focus group. They expressed relief at being granted an opportunity to speak candidly, without fear of reprisal, in response to our questions about how to handle emotionally-charged hypothetical scenarios between coworkers of different races. Participants indicated a deep hunger for mediated dialogue. Those who identified themselves as black seemed particularly grateful to join a facilitated discussion that opened the eyes of white coworkers to forms of subtle racism. Their responses underscore why black employees, more than their coworkers, regularly experience isolation and alienation as a result of not being able to talk about their experiences of racial bias.

“In light of the recent election, it’s important to me that my company reinforces its commitment to inclusion and diversity. It’s especially important with a winner endorsed by the KKK.”
—Black female focus group participant

“People do not want to be considered bad people and are afraid of being labeled as racists. Sometimes, it takes a safe place to discuss this with someone to calm their fear of that perception.”
—Black female focus group participant

“I have a coworker I suspect won’t open up to me because he/she is of a different race. It affects our working relationship; there is never full trust.”
—White male focus group participant
Silence costs companies

THE TOLL OF SILENTLY CARRYING EXPERIENCES of racial bias and discrimination into the workplace extends beyond private pain. It affects employees’ performance on the job. Many feel isolated and alienated from workplace colleagues and supervisors, which can interfere with their ability to collaborate. For black employees, the cost is deepest—when they’re unable to speak about their experiences of bias and discrimination, they’re more likely to have one foot out the door, to disengage, and to feel they cannot show up authentically at work. Our societal tension—compounded by an inability to share our pain at work—can deeply affect colleagues’ ability to perform at their best. It can also prevent them from envisioning a long-term future at their companies, especially if they sense their employers aren’t aware or sensitive to issues of racial tension.
Not being able to speak about bias heightens workplace alienation for many

“My white colleagues will speak out aggressively about police interactions with no trepidation, no concern how that impacts us, their black colleagues. Our perspective is different. They're not sensitive to that. That's hard for me to accept. That's where the barrier comes in.”
—Black male sales director, Orlando, Florida

“It's hard for white people to recognize white privilege and call it what it is.”
—Asian female focus group participant

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<th>Employees who regularly feel isolated and/or alienated at work</th>
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<td><strong>Employees who say it is <strong>NEVER ACCEPTABLE</strong> at their companies to speak out about experiences of bias based on race</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Employees who say it is <strong>ACCEPTABLE</strong> at their companies to speak out about experiences of bias based on race</strong></td>
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Employees who feel isolated and/or alienated at work:

- **Black**: 35%
- **White**: 28%
- **Asian**: 20%
- **Latino**: 17%

Employees who say it is acceptable at their companies to speak out about experiences of bias based on race:

- **Black**: 16%
- **White**: 17%
- **Asian**: 11%
- **Latino**: 21%
When they can’t talk about bias, black employees disengage

Black employees who say it is never acceptable at their companies to speak out about experiences of racial bias are nearly three times as likely to intend to leave their companies within a year as black employees who say it is acceptable to speak out about experiences of racial bias.

They’re also more than three times as likely to feel they can’t bring their whole selves to work.

“I have absolutely changed my behavior at work as a result of my heightened awareness of discrimination. I try to avoid making sudden movements. I don’t raise my voice. I don’t let myself be seen ‘code switching,’ or seen as too urban in my conversational style.”

—Black female attorney, Orlando, Florida

And they’re a whopping thirteen times as likely to be disengaged.

BLACK EMPLOYEES WHO SAY IT IS NEVER ACCEPTABLE AT THEIR COMPANIES TO SPEAK OUT ABOUT EXPERIENCES BASED ON RACE

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MANAGERS ARE OFTEN CLUELESS

For Tonya*, corporate counsel for a firm in St. Louis, the summer of 2016 was a nightmare—and not just because July proved particularly deadly for unarmed black men in Baton Rouge and Minneapolis. As the only African American in her department, she was a daily target for her boss to unload her opinions about black people as she formed them from watching the nightly news. “Did you see what those protesters did yesterday?” she’d ask Tonya, not waiting for a response before adding, “They just need to all go get jobs.” Or, referencing a television appearance by Lezley McSpadden: “That mother of the young man killed in Ferguson, who just came back from Switzerland? She didn’t even raise him. She’s just in it for the money.” Tonya’s tactic was to deflect the conversation to something less contentious (“Look at her fire-engine-red hair!”). “I can’t make her comments into a dialogue,” she says. “If I do, I’m going to thwart my career. I’d appear to be siding with the protesters, people my boss considers criminals.” Keeping quiet is the counsel she’s gotten from black colleagues outside her department, too—especially those who, like Tonya, grew up in St. Louis. “Hatred is always on display here,” she explains. “Slavery and race and discrimination, that’s the culture. You need to get over it and try to get along. If that means you silence your views and feelings, then you do that.”

* Indicates a name change to ensure source's anonymity, here and throughout the text

BLACK EMPLOYEES, ALREADY UNDERREPRESENTED, ARE MOST LIKELY TO LEAVE

Despite diversity targets and programs, representation of blacks in the private sector is low—particularly among senior-level professionals.19

Given the dismal representation of black professionals at senior levels of the organization, leaders should be particularly concerned by the disproportionate impact that silence has on the quit rates of black professionals.

Senior managers and above who intend to leave their companies in less than a year:

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Employers can help

WHILE OPENING UP SPACE for respectful conversation won’t assure all employees that their companies will support their rights, it is an important first step toward creating a culture where employees feel heard and understood by colleagues.
Talking about race at work remains difficult

CURRENTLY, MOST COMPANIES AVOID RESPONDING TO EXTERNAL INCIDENCES OF RACIAL VIOLENCE

Very few in our survey said their companies responded to police shootings of unarmed black men. It’s still viewed as a risky proposition.

“Leaders think a response would distract us from the business, but actually the silence is more distracting. When there’s an elephant in the room, it makes a company look cowardly not to address it in some way, even if it’s only internally.”
— White female focus group participant

“Race is our country’s original sin. We like to think we’re postracial, but there is so much understandable pain associated with our complicated relationship with race—including the reality that white people don’t wish to be blamed and often want to ignore that there is a problem. All of us have been impacted.”
— Kendra Thomas, Vice President, Global Head of Diversity & Inclusion, Pearson

“We are really struggling with this. As lawyers, whenever we speak we’re seen as not just speaking for ourselves but for our clients. Our whole profession is about not prejudging injustice. That makes it really complicated for us to shout from the mountaintop in response to every headline. But against the harsh light of these traumatic events, silence is inevitably misconstrued. And that deeply troubles me.”
— Kent Gardiner, Chairman Emeritus, Crowell & Moring

“My company publicly responded to police shootings of unarmed black men

11%
COWORKERS HESITATE TO DISCUSS RACE FOR A VARIETY OF REASONS

Focus group respondents offered a host of reasons for why coworkers shy away from initiating or participating in discussions about race relations or even discussions of how their lived realities outside of work may profoundly differ.

Talking about race can be:

- **All talk, no action**
  
  “I prefer to see more than a statement from senior leadership. It is important to show, through actions, a commitment to key issues such as race relations.”
  —Black female focus group participant

- **Culturally inappropriate**
  
  “I have family from the Dominican Republic, and they just want to assimilate and be left alone. That’s how things are among non-white Cubans and black Puerto Ricans, too.”
  —Black/Latina female attorney, Orlando, Florida

- **Historically freighted**
  
  “Talking about race is difficult because of the US history of slavery. I think it goes right to the center of who you are, and it's the part of who you are that's highly visible to others.”
  —White male focus group participant

- **A minefield of terms to avoid**
  
  “As a non-American employee, I often feel confused about the correct words to use... what is still acceptable to some people can now be offensive to others, and if you are white, it feels like you cannot afford to make a mistake.”
  —White female focus group participant
Employers can help employees feel comfortable talking about race

In the face of such discomfort, employers have an opportunity. Under the right circumstances, many of our respondents say, they would feel comfortable discussing race relations at work—regardless of their racial background.

When it comes to discussing race relations at work...

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<th>Race</th>
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<th>I Would Be Comfortable Under Certain Circumstances</th>
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<td>39%</td>
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<td>White</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“I think that senior leaders should model the talk about race. They can set the example. I do not agree with those who would take the responsibilities off of our leaders. That will never make our organization more inclusive.”

—White female focus group participant

“Many employees do want a place where they can feel comfortable sharing what is profoundly significant in their lives with their colleagues. But because these conversations are so fraught with tripwires and landmines, they have to take place with care. They have to be structured and directed—and have specific objectives—so that they are helpful. You have to have the language, as well as the right environment. For black people, the reaction of dominant groups to their perceptions of discrimination is basically dismissive. That makes it harder for black people to raise those issues in any setting.”

—Heide Gardner, Chief Diversity & Inclusion Officer, Interpublic Group
OUR DATA SHOWS that employees benefit from having open conversations about race at work—it’s an important first step to help them process the social bias and discrimination they may experience in their personal lives. CEOs, ERG leaders, HR and diversity specialists, team leaders, and external facilitators all have roles to play in creating safe spaces for such conversations—especially since, as we find, many employees are only comfortable discussing race relations at work under certain circumstances.

To create the right circumstances, companies must first acknowledge internally that the issue of race merits attention. Then, corporate leaders should build awareness and provide education to support better engagement between colleagues of different races, so that they may then start the right kind of internal dialogue, with conversations predicated on asking open questions and listening intently. Finally, companies can respond to internal conversations in ways that are meaningful and targeted, with interventions such as access to therapeutic support and manager training for employees, or starting an external conversation about race.

This section focuses on that crucial first step: how to start the conversation about race.
Two weeks after the shootings in Baton Rouge, Louisiana; St. Paul, Minnesota; and Dallas, Texas, Tim Ryan, US chairman of PwC, initiated a series of discussions about race relations with all levels of staff in offices across the country. Ryan, who led the Atlanta discussion, wanted simply to create a space where colleagues could share what was on their minds and be assured that other colleagues would listen. “We all show up to work with something, some issue with our kids or a concern we can’t put aside,” says Ryan, who has six children. “I’ll come to work and talk with my team about a fight I had with my teenage son. But a black person can’t come to work and talk about, say, his fears for his son as a student at a predominantly white school. That’s the result we were trying to get to: where others understand the concerns our black colleagues might show up with every day. This isn’t easy but when we talk about trust and being ourselves at work, race is part of the conversation.”

Ryan, who had only just been appointed US chair July 1st, 2016, was acutely aware of the challenges inherent to initiating such a conversation. “How do we be sure we don’t put the firm at risk?” he asked his newly formed leadership team July 8th, after the spate of shootings. “If we come out strong, we may be seen as pushing our view on others; we could alienate our people, our clients, or the communities we do business in.”

So he tested the waters, sending out that day a company-wide email. Within a week, he had hundreds of responses in his inbox. “It was clear, reading those emails, that we really didn’t know how each other felt, white or black,” he says. Respondents not only shared how they felt; they thanked Ryan for acknowledging the tensions and fears. “The silence among my colleagues was deafening,” as one staffer put it.

Ryan called together his leadership team and committed to having enterprise-wide discussions in an initiative called Building Trust, which launched shortly thereafter. All PwC employees received a brief video featuring Ryan and Minority Initiatives and Talent Management Leader Elena Richards, along with a discussion guide to open up a dialogue with their teams. “Everyone kind of approaches work as if it’s so separate from what’s going on at home and in our communities,” explains Richards. “We have colleagues sitting across from each other every day, and all of a sudden there are these huge events in the media happening all around us, but we are expected to come to work and not discuss them. We wanted to bridge that divide and give people the opportunity to hit pause, engage, and really listen to what each other may be experiencing and feeling.”

She adds, “We’re not just giving permission, but openly encouraging the conversation to come inside our walls.” She and Ryan set conversational ground rules such as: Listen, share, and be respectful. Don’t debate, take sides, discuss politics, try to convince people, or brainstorm solutions. “It was about creating a culture where you can express what really matters to you, because that doesn’t go away when you set foot in the office or jump on a call with your team, it stays with you,” Richards explains. The conversations will be an ongoing part of PwC’s inclusion strategy as events outside of work continue to demand them.

“We have core values around diversity and inclusion at this firm, and my job is to make sure we’re not waverering on them,” says Ryan. “To those who are worried about this, I would say: it’s time to move beyond your personal comfort zone. Our people are concerned about how to talk openly about issues of race inside and outside the workplace and they expect PwC to be part of the solution.”
Acknowledge that racial tension is an issue

CEOs affirm company values, as well as their own integrity and courage, when they respond promptly—and authentically—to instances of racial injustice by email, video, phone call, or intranet blast to their entire workforce. While a CEO message isn’t sufficient to create a culture in which coworkers feel comfortable having difficult conversations, it does acknowledge that the issue of race matters at work. CEOs set the tone and amplify the urgency for conversations about race.

**GUIDELINES**

- CEO responses often work best when they are prompt
  Tim Ryan of PwC received an overwhelming response of relief from employees when, the day after three straight days of tragic shootings in Louisiana, Minnesota, and Texas, he sent out an email addressing the violence.

- Suggest the CEO tell a personal story to demonstrate authenticity and vulnerability
  Randall Stephenson, CEO of AT&T, shared how his close friend’s experiences of racial discrimination made him aware of his own privilege, as a white male. Sharing that “aha moment” at a meeting of AT&T’s Employee Resource Groups (ERG’s), Stephenson demonstrated that he values exploring these issues in the workplace.

**KEY POINTS TO COVER IN AN EMAIL FROM THE CEO**

- Set the scene by relaying facts of the event, expressing a genuine personal reaction
- Indicate why the event must be addressed/remedied in society (part of a larger problem, leading to more division, etc.)
- Remind employees that those they work alongside every day may be deeply affected or even traumatized in ways that aren’t apparent
- Reinforce company values and ways employees can demonstrate those values
- Offer resources and points of contact for employees who need therapy or other support
- Call for open and honest communication among colleagues and for unity in the face of tragedy

See appendix for full-text CEO emails from AB (AllianceBernstein) and Interpublic Group
Create the circumstances for productive conversations

We find that across race and ethnicity, less than one third of employees are comfortable talking about race at work—yet, under the right circumstances, the majority of employees could be comfortable. So, if employees are comfortable talking about race only under certain circumstances, which circumstances are those? In our survey, we asked respondents to identify settings in which they would feel comfortable talking about race relations. Still, getting the setting right isn’t enough. Different settings work better for different individuals, and we find that talent cohorts tend to have differing preferences as well. We’ll go through guidelines and highlight best practices for each circumstance our respondents highlighted as making them feel more comfortable having a conversation about race.

Under which of the following circumstances would you feel comfortable discussing race relations at work? (Employees who are not currently comfortable discussing race relations at work)

1. IF MY MANAGER/TEAM LEADER INITIATED A DISCUSSION ONE-ON-ONE
2. IF MY MANAGER/TEAM LEADER INITIATED A DISCUSSION WITH OUR TEAM
3. IF HR INVITED EMPLOYEES TO ATTEND AN INTERNAL DISCUSSION MODERATED BY EXTERNAL SPEAKERS
4. IF A SENIOR LEADER AT MY FIRM SHARED HIS/HER CONCERN ABOUT RACE RELATIONS AT A TOWN HALL OR OTHER INTERNAL EVENT
5. DURING AN ERG GATHERING OR IN A SETTING WITH EMPLOYEES OF MY SAME BACKGROUND

“As leaders, we’re not always connected to the cross section of realities that employees experience. Reaching out to better understand those realities demonstrates inclusion. It’s not pleasant, but the more we’re exposed, the greater our capacity to expand our comfort zones. I believe I’m a better leader for being more in touch and open to hearing people’s views—even those I don’t necessarily agree with.”
—Sandy Harris, Vice President, Global Diversity & Inclusion, Sodexo

EDUCATION AND RESOURCES CAN FOSTER PRODUCTIVE DIALOGUE

We heard in focus groups and interviews that one reason many hesitate to discuss race, or feel defensive when they do so, is a sense of undereducation and lack of awareness about sources of slights, snubs and microaggressions. “We have no problem slamming some finance tycoon for making sexist comments, but we become so divided when someone comments inappropriately about race,” says a black female communications executive in New York. “We let them off the hook by saying ‘it’s just so uncomfortable to discuss.’” Companies can provide resources to educate employees about these triggers in a few ways:

- An internal video campaign in which colleagues share experiences of micro-aggressions or empathy
- Suggestions of articles to read and educational documentaries or TV shows to watch on the company intranet
- “Get smart” sheets about common slights/snubs/stigmas about different identity groups circulated via email or on company intranet
ENABLE ONE-ON-ONE CONVERSATIONS

Often, it takes one relationship at a time to improve race relations. Perhaps that's why, when asked about settings under which they might feel comfortable discussing race, our survey-takers' top choice was one-on-one discussions with managers. Understandably, one-on-one conversations can be intimidating and work best between people who have already established a healthy level of trust. Even then, individuals can be better equipped to drive these discussions themselves.

GUIDELINES
To foster dialogue between individuals...
- Provide training tools for all employees, as Wells Fargo has (see right), so they can learn how to have tough conversations in listening mode.
- Insist managers routinely “check in” with team members, creating opportunities for such conversations—and then use those conversations wisely.

“It’s very much in our culture to say, “Something is wrong. How are you doing?” But these conversations are hard. You have to make time to be thoughtful and listen.”
—Ibi Krukrubo, Audit Partner, Ernst & Young LLP

“There was a police shooting in the area, and a fellow manager asked me what my thoughts were on the subject. We talked about the history of law enforcement relationships in the black community. A few weeks later, this manager followed up with me. I said what I thought: ‘The police will receive paid leave, get their jobs back, and the investigation will show that excessive force was not used.’ The manager did not respond directly, but he appeared to be in deep thought. It felt good to think maybe I’d opened his eyes.”
—Black male focus group participant

WELLS FARGO’S COURAGEOUS CONVERSATION TOOLKIT

Learning modules, available to all employees on the company’s Diversity and Inclusion site since 2015, provide tips and guidance on what courageous conversations sound like and how to get into listening instead of problem-solving mode. Widely used on the individual level, the aid has also found significant footing among managers seeking to facilitate group sessions. The toolkit offers guidance on best timing, venue, and environment; how to prepare; and how to come off as authentic. “Without help it can be hard to see an option besides avoidance or accusation,” says Bryan Gingrich, senior vice president and enterprise Diversity and Inclusion leader. Checking in with team members after a shooting incident or after the election with questions like, “How are you doing? How are you feeling?” have become common at Wells Fargo and, as Gingrich points out, can go a long way. “Having a forum where people can share and be acknowledged without being undermined is very empowering,” he concludes. “We can’t bring our whole selves to work if we can’t be transparent with each other.”
EMPOWER SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Sometimes, difficult dialogue works best in small groups, where participants know one another and a variety of perspectives are mediated by a manager or HR business partner acting as facilitator.

GUIDELINES
To foster team discussions about race, help managers understand how to:

- Break the ice gently
- Listen actively in their teams, using open language like “I hear you” and avoiding crosstalk. Consult resources such as “Flip the Script”,20 We Can’t Talk About That at Work!,21 Crucial Conversations,22 and The Color Bind23 for more best practices.
- Consider bringing together colleagues who are not within the same reporting lines for conversations about race, as Crowell & Moring did in their “Diversity Dialogues” (see right).

“...encourage managers to start meetings with questions like, ‘tell me about experiences you’ve had around X topic.’ Managers aren’t always comfortable—team members will say something unexpected and they don’t know how to respond. We have more work to do to ensure our leaders are ready for these conversations. We’re committed to doing it, because it’s crucial to be talking about race relations at this exact moment in our history.”

—Kendra Thomas, Vice President, Global Head of Diversity & Inclusion, Pearson

DRIVING DIVERSITY DIALOGUES

The law firm Crowell & Moring has employed the small group discussion format for its “Diversity Dialogues,” mandatory 20 to 25 person discussions that were facilitated in prior years by trained firm employees and included staff, associates, and partners who were not within reporting lines—a structure that proved critical to the program’s success, says Partner Keith Harrison, as participants were able to ask more relevant questions and bring more applicable hypotheticals to the table than if there had been external facilitators. The mandatory nature of the conversations also proved crucial to developing an ongoing openness to discussing race, as anyone could strike up a conversation with anyone else knowing that, while they were perhaps in a different discussion group, they, too, had engaged on this topic. Facilitators used a PowerPoint as a loose guide, but opened the floor to conversation.

Harrison noticed that staff members at more junior levels were the most outspoken and heartened at the opportunity to share what they felt had been instances of discrimination. White partners and associates came to realize, in turn, the negative impact remarks they had thought were innocuous might have on colleagues of color. Harrison says the firm will continue to have these conversations periodically to ensure everyone has the platform to speak about race relations at work.

“We've tried something called D&Icebreakers. It's intent is to encourage managers to start meetings with questions like, ‘tell me about experiences you've had around X topic.’ Managers aren't always comfortable—team members will say something unexpected and they don’t know how to respond. We have more work to do to ensure our leaders are ready for these conversations. We're committed to doing it, because it's crucial to be talking about race relations at this exact moment in our history.”

—Kendra Thomas, Vice President, Global Head of Diversity & Inclusion, Pearson

BREAK THE SILENCE INTERNALLY
BRING IN OUTSIDERS

External speakers can have dual value: expertise and openness. Sometimes, an outsider is at more liberty to share and surface frank stories.

GUIDELINES

• Invite speakers with first-hand experience at the fault lines of racial tension, as New York Life did (see right), to give employees new insights into different lived realities.

• Bring in a facilitator—an acknowledged expert external to the company, or a highly trained employee—to keep the conversation from becoming polarizing.

“We’d never had a formal conversation about race as a firm, but we recognized the importance of doing so. However, we had to acknowledge that we didn’t know how to do it. So we knew we needed not only someone external to facilitate, but also a structure to the conversation so that we engaged in productive and meaningful dialogue.”

— George Nichols III, Executive Vice President and Head of Office of Governmental Affairs, New York Life

HIGHLIGHTING RACIAL TENSION

In November 2016, New York Life hosted “Coming Together: A Conversation on Race Relations” at the organization’s headquarters, a session which was broadcast nationally to ten different locations, overflowing capacity at every site. Chairman and CEO Ted Mathas kicked off “Coming Together” along with George Nichols III, Executive Vice President in charge of Governmental Affairs and the executive sponsor of the African American ERG. Their introduction was followed by a talk from the Perception Institute, a consortium specializing in the study of racial anxiety and implicit bias. Several employees shared personal stories: a black man showed a picture of his bridal party and talked about unwarranted police encounters experienced by each member; a white woman told a story of a time she saw herself exhibiting unconscious racial bias. These stories helped create a safe space for the facilitated table sessions that followed.

Participants left the event equipped with the tools and inspiration to continue having difficult conversations about race at the individual, department, and firm-wide levels. “Participants said it was the most meaningful event they’d attended in their careers,” says Vice President and Chief Diversity Officer Kathleen Navarro, who, in concert with the African American ERG, is planning a series of follow-up sessions to empower employees across the company to engage in these conversations. “Change won’t happen overnight. As we continue to expand our race relations program, we will create an atmosphere for day to day employee interactions on this topic.”
GUIDELINES
To set a town hall or internal event up for success...

• Involve the C-suite to underscore their commitment to this issue.
  “I’m someone who feels comfortable talking about my experience as a black man. But other people felt safe doing so, in large part, because our CEO fully advocated and supported open dialogue around some of the most sensitive issues you can talk about.”
  —Keith McClain, Vice President and Head of Compensation, New York Life

• Signal genuine commitment and intention to learn.
  “If companies are willing to entertain this conversation, it’s utterly worth the discomfort and the challenge. Not knowing how to do it is no excuse; being willing to try is more important than doing it perfectly. Whether people attend a forum or not, just having it speaks to overwhelming positivity about the organization, that it would tackle something so hard to navigate, with such uncertain outcomes. Don’t judge success by attendance, but by the ripple effect.”
  —Allison Allen, Director, Talent Leader Southwest Region, EY

HOLD A TOWN HALL
Leaders convene town halls to share a business imperative or to solicit input on a firm-wide initiative. Employees attend town halls to hear from, and interact with, upper management. When leaders convene a town hall to talk about race, the medium itself sends a powerful message: every employee will understand, whether they attend or not, that talking about race is a priority for the firm.

GETTING RAW AND REAL
A bank turned to one of its ERG members who happened also to be a volunteer with the county sheriff’s office to spearhead a conversation about race relations. Brittany*, Eastern Region lead for the ERG, says it was one of the best decisions they made, because their internal event happened to take place a day after local resident Keith Scott was fatally shot by a black police officer two miles from campus.

With some 250 employees in the audience asking “raw and real” questions of police officers on the stage, the conversation might have turned contentious, says Brittany, but for the moderator’s skilled interventions. “Let’s take a minute, let’s take a deep breath,” he reminded the audience after one officer explained why police shoot to kill. “We came here to listen. We may not like the answer, but we’re seeking to understand.”

That quashed the tension, says Brittany. “The person who asked the question came up afterward and told the officer, ‘I didn’t like what you said, but I appreciate your trying to educate us.’ The respect was there. It showed leadership that, while we may not agree with each other, if we can trust each other to have a productive dialogue then we can still go back to work and it will be okay.”
CREATING VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES

Building on the success of its national leadership dialogue session, Sodexo hosted a webinar series to allow further discussions with managers and raise their awareness in addressing and overcoming binary thinking around highly charged topics. These ongoing webinars create a virtual community during times of unrest, and managers gain insights from one another and guidance from an external subject matter expert. In addition, several Employee Business Resource Groups provided dialogue opportunities at their regional and national meetings. “When people are invited to share their experiences as they are navigating through turbulent times, they are better equipped to respond effectively with their teams, and all those we serve,” says Sandy Harris, vice president of Global Diversity & Inclusion.

SURFACING EMPATHY

At Boehringer Ingelheim’s “Navigating Through Challenging Times” forum, senior leaders participated in-person while employees from around the country joined virtually and contributed questions online to supplement those from in-person attendees. More than 100 people were actively engaged for two hours. Held in 2016 in response to the Orlando Pulse nightclub shooting, the Black Lives Matter movement and the new Blue Lives Matter movement, the discussion sought to foster understanding of all difference by creating a safe space for anyone interested in understanding a point of view that differed from their own. “There was a lot that was weighing on people, but wasn’t being discussed,” explains Nancy Di Dia, chief Inclusion & Diversity officer at BI. “On the one hand, you have people trying to deal with their anger, confusion, and worry for their children and families. On the other, you have colleagues with family members in law enforcement, feeling fear every day that those loved ones might not come back alive.” What appeared to be a delicate collection of different-minded individuals, says Di Dia, proved to be a productive cohort of empathetic, curious, and compassionate colleagues. “It was the opposite of an echo chamber,” she recounts. “The value is immeasurable — of the catharsis of expression, of the feeling that they have a truly safe space to engage on topics that other workplaces treat as taboo. Doing this and succeeding with it really validated our diversity and inclusion practices to these employees. We showed them that we truly walk the talk.”
HOST A DISCUSSION WITHIN YOUR COMPANY’S EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUPS (ERG’S)

At many organizations, conversations about race germinate within the African American ERG before taking root in Diversity & Inclusion circles—and ultimately flowering as company-wide, management-backed initiatives. Our data shows this model is valuable for another reason: black professionals that we surveyed are more likely than other professionals of color to favor a conversation that takes place in the sanctuary of an ERG meeting or with employees of the same background. Even if non-ERG members are invited to attend, black interviewees tell us they feel safer and more inclined to candidly contribute when surrounded by employees like themselves.

GUIDELINES

- Involve leaders from other ERG’s as allies and conversational ambassadors.
- Use the ERG meeting as a “test run” for a broader group discussion or town hall, structuring the dialogue with a facilitator and a panel of senior leaders.

Redia Anderson, Chief Inclusion and Diversity officer at BP, recalls a conversation on being consciously inclusive at an annual US BRG summit. Some members of the BP African American business resource group described feeling minimized and choosing to remain silent and muzzled after hearing comments from some of their outspoken white colleagues during everyday conversations. For some of the white men and women BRG colleagues in attendance, they reported this learning to be an eye-opening experience, one that left some of them noticeably concerned and shaken. “One woman was near tears; she had no idea,” of this impact on some of her dear friends and colleagues, Anderson remembers. “It also made clear to her what she could do to support her colleagues when she returned to her team.”
At EY, conversations about race began in 2015 after several people asked what response and guidance leadership would offer in light of the massacre at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in South Carolina. Diana Cruz Solash, global and Americas director, Diversity & Inclusiveness and Ethnic Minority strategy leader at EY recalled one particular conversation she had with a young black man who said, “I just wonder if leadership sees the problem. Do they know what I’m carrying, in terms of fear for my family, my siblings, and my friends?”

For Solash and others, hearing such vulnerability was “eye-opening.” It became clear to EY’s leadership that silence could be seen as a lack of concern. Recognizing the need for a collective acknowledgement, Steve Howe, EY’s US Chairman and Americas Managing Partner and Karyn Twaronite, EY’s Global Diversity & Inclusiveness Officer, convened EY’s Americas Inclusiveness Advisory Council (IAC) to engage in a “fishbowl conversation on race” in the fall of 2015, enlisting a cultural anthropologist to facilitate it. His questions were simple: “What worries you about stereotypes in the current environment? How do you know these perceptions exist? What do you wish people would know or ask about you?” “Initially it was not an easy discussion,” notes Solash. “But as the dialogue progressed, people became closer. You could feel the trust being built.” This foundation led to a powerful session with EY’s US Executive Committee members, as well as a webcast—“Leading Through Difference”—with the organization’s leaders across the US. Both sessions covered what it feels like to be in the minority, the concept of white privilege and, most importantly, the actions leaders can take to create a sense of belonging for all EY people.

As a result of this broad leadership dialogue about race, EY was better prepared to have organization-wide conversations about the shootings that occurred in the summer of 2016. Howe sent a message to all EY professionals in the US encouraging them to have more candid dialogues about race and to be supportive of one another. Twaronite and her team created group discussion and one-on-one check-in guides to provide suggestions for facilitating such discussions. As word spread, each gathering garnered greater attendance. EY’s West Region introduced virtual sessions in addition to the in-person ones; ultimately, 1000 employees took part.

Group discussions prompted, in turn, one-on-one dialogue between team leaders and members. Following an IAC meeting in the West Region, for example, Audit Partner Ibi Krukrubo felt empowered to broach a conversation about race with a Muslim woman on his team. He expected a ten-minute exchange. Instead, they spoke for an hour around the impact of the current environment on someone who is Muslim and about the point of view of an African American male. “It shows we’ve achieved a greater level of trust, if she feels she can share with me what she’s thinking,” says Krukrubo.

To ensure that the conversation continues, EY has expanded its “r u Okay?” campaign. Originally intended to help leaders notice signs of mental illness or addictions, it now features a number of offerings, including signs that may indicate someone is struggling, as well as ways to initiate a dialogue. Solash feels the guidelines have empowered more employees—both minority and majority—to have such conversations more spontaneously. “I do feel we’re at a tipping point,” she says. Krukrubo agrees. “Talking about race has given us the emotional muscles to engage on other difficult topics. That’s something most companies haven’t done, and will find it hard to replicate when they most need to.”
Take a public stance on race

Perhaps the boldest way a company can signal its commitment to battling discrimination and improving race relations is by engaging with its widest audience: consumers and clients. As we've documented, the brand benefits when leaders respond to societal incidents of racial discrimination.

That said, not every tragedy, injustice, or episode of violence in the news warrants a corporate response. Engaging the public is risky. Shareholders and consumers are quick to punish an approach that is tone-deaf in its execution, as Starbucks' Howard Schultz discovered when his #RaceTogether campaign fomented more criticism than it did dialogue between baristas and customers.
Release a public company statement arguing against racial injustice

GUIDELINES
To formulate a public response to racial injustice or discrimination:

• Align to corporate values of diversity, inclusion, and worker well-being
  “The more people I have reporting to me, the more I appreciate the complexity of taking a point of view for one hundred eighty seven thousand employees around the world. Out of respect for a difference of opinion, we do not voice an opinion...but employees have to know their safety and well-being is a priority for the firm. If we want all employees to work in an environment where they don’t face discrimination, then we should no longer be going to North Carolina [where there are restrictions on trans people using restrooms of their correct gender]. If there's an opportunity to stand by our values, that's it.” — Vice President and global platform leader at a medical device company

• Publish a message of support on social media
  On his Facebook timeline, CEO Mark Zuckerberg addressed the death of Philando Castile, the aftermath of which was broadcast on Facebook Live by Castile’s girlfriend, Diamond Reynolds. The statement concluded: “While I hope we never have to see another video like Diamond’s, it reminds us why coming together to build a more open and connected world is so important—and how far we still have to go.”

• Share your CEO’s internal message publicly
  By sharing publicly their CEO’s statements to employees, several companies have provided transparency to their investors, consumers, and potential hires—as well as set an example for other CEOs to follow inside their own companies.

Several organizations took to Twitter to express their solidarity with the victims of high-profile acts of violence; for instance, Microsoft tweeted, “We join the millions mourning in Baton Rouge, Falcon Heights, and Dallas and we stand with those committed to change around the world.” Pandora explicitly championed the BLM cause, employing the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag in a tweet that read: “Our hearts ache for those who unfairly lost their lives. We stand with marginalized communities. We stand for racial justice. We stand for equity. And we stand together to make this world a better place. #BlackLivesMatter #LoveAboveAll.”
Mark Parker, CEO of Nike, wrote a letter in July 2016 to his 32,000 employees in which he admitted, “I’m struggling to make sense of the incomprehensible.” He addressed the importance of engaging on the topics of “destructive forces” such as discrimination and racial injustice, explaining that “talking about these issues can help find peace and paths forward. I firmly believe we are at our best when we engage and listen to those around us, in our communities at home and at work.” He closed his letter with the hashtags #blacklivesmatter and #stoptheviolence.

Ben & Jerry’s October 2016 campaign epitomized this consumer-facing approach and was one of the more cogent public displays of solidarity with Black Lives Matter, or any cause. The company put forth a detailed and resourceful webpage on its site titled “Why Black Lives Matter,” outlining Ben & Jerry’s moral obligation to take a stand for justice and for black lives, and ending with a call-to-arms for its customers: “Systemic and institutionalized racism are the defining civil rights and social justice issues of our time...We ask you to join us in not being complicit.” The expected backlash came amid tremendous positive coverage and support, and the move forced many who lacked an understanding of or appreciation for the movement to either confront their own biases and misconceptions or otherwise boycott a beloved brand.

Starbucks contributed to the polarizing national conversation surrounding immigration and refugees in a direct and public way, making a global commitment via a post on its website to hire 10,000 refugees by 2022, asserting that refugees’ “talent, experience, and resilience will enrich the communities we serve around the world.” Unfazed by renewed calls to #BoycottStarbucks, the multinational giant continues to use its visibility and market power to take up the cause of the disadvantaged.

Ford Foundation, like Ben & Jerry’s, took an unapologetic stance in the midst of racial tensions with its piece, “Why Black Lives Matter to Philanthropy,” where the foundation not only aligned itself ideologically with the BLM cause, but also pledged concrete financial support: “Ford has made six-year investments in the organizations that compose the Movement for Black Lives...so that these visionary leaders and organizations can continue to cultivate and maintain a movement of young black women and men who are pushing through established boundaries as they seek to realize the promise of equality and justice for all.”
D&I and HR specialists often carry the torch for their companies in the public sphere, denouncing acts of violence and calling for respect and unity in the face of tragedy. The public voice of the D&I specialist can bring expertise to bear in both tone and content.

**KEY POINTS TO COVER IN A MESSAGE FROM THE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION OFFICE:**

- Establish your role in the company and experience in the space
- Share a personal story of how this topic affects you or someone close to you as an example of why a safe space for dialogue is necessary
- Acknowledge the value of different perspectives and backgrounds
- Explain how the event at hand can lead to divisiveness at work and how it may threaten the company’s D&I values
- Express why it is important to bring the conversation into the workplace, and the costs to employees’ mental well-being if they don’t feel safe doing so
- Point to one-on-one, personal, brief interactions as key moments at work that make or break an inclusive atmosphere
- Provide actionable guidelines for having productive and inclusive conversations at work

**Erika Irish Brown, global head of Diversity and Inclusion at Bloomberg LP,** wrote an article in July 2016 imploring colleagues to acknowledge and foster inclusivity around the deeply painful events impacting the country, asking that they “show compassion to employees impacted by issues outside our office walls, and offer outlets where they can share real emotion and dialogue in a safe place.” Irish Brown drove her message home by making a personal connection, saying, “As a mother of three black boys, I could not hold back my emotion when I learned about the shootings of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile. I found the details of their untimely deaths overwhelming and the retaliatory shooting...despicable.”

**Edith Cooper, global head of Human Capital Management at Goldman Sachs,** posted a blog in September of 2016 in which she expressed how deeply she felt the racial violence in the United States and how isolating life as a black professional can be, saying, “I’ve been asked to serve coffee at a client meeting (despite being there to “run” the meeting)... People frequently assumed I was the most junior person in the room, when in fact, I was the most senior. I constantly needed to share my credentials when nobody else had to share theirs.” The post was part of a larger push encouraging Goldman Sachs employees to talk about race at work.
Take other public action

A public condemnation of racial violence is one way that leadership can show it prioritizes employees’ well-being both inside and outside the workplace. But other displays of support count as much if not more, provided they’re aligned with the business of the organization.

GUIDELINES

- Support and/or subsidize community outreach or events that promote dialogue on issues of race, as Sodexo did (see below)
- Support and/or subsidize “pro bono” efforts to address racial injustice, as Crowell & Moring did (see below)

Sodexo empowers its employees to serve institutional communities outside its paying client base. One week after the police officers were shot and killed in Dallas, for example, Sodexo’s African American leadership forum reached out to the Dallas police department to inquire if anyone was providing them with meals. “It was their way of acknowledging, ‘This situation is not okay,’ and, by providing lunches to the police, saying, ‘We’re with you,’” explains Sandy Harris, vice president, Global Diversity & Inclusion. “They didn’t have to ask permission, because this is what we do as an organization. To be of service to others in need is in complete alignment with our mission.”

The Washington DC–based law firm Crowell & Moring stepped up its already sizeable commitment to pro bono work, sponsoring staffers and lawyers in public interest legal activities wherever they wish to devote their energies—and giving them full advancement credit for those hours. “Our people can effect change by practicing the law in cases that promote racial justice, not just in those paid for by a client,” Chairman Emeritus Kent Gardiner says.
Benefits of breaking the silence

**TALKING ABOUT RACIAL TENSION** in the workplace can open up far more than dialogue. It can also make employees feel far more comfortable sharing their ideas, integrated in their teams, and valued in the workplace. They’re more engaged. When companies speak out publicly about race relations, moreover, they reap brand benefits.
Talking about race at work benefits the business

A CRUCIAL STEP in creating environments where professionals feel they can share experiences of bias is opening a conversation about race relations. We find that when employees feel they can discuss race relations, they are more likely to feel that their ideas are heard and recognized.

That’s critical for businesses whose growth strategy depends on innovation, because when employees of all backgrounds and racial identities feel inclined to contribute, a wealth of diverse ideas flows into the problem-solving pipeline. CTI research shows that, when coupled with leadership that both embodies and embraces diversity (“2D diversity”), this idea-rich pipeline is more likely to culminate in market-worthy innovations. An environment where race relations can be discussed is likely, that is, to be a place where innovation thrives.

**Which of the following do you agree with?**

- **I FEEL FREE TO EXPRESS MY VIEWS AND OPINIONS**
  - I AM CURRENTLY COMFORTABLE DISCUSSING RACE RELATIONS AT WORK: 76%
  - I AM NOT CURRENTLY COMFORTABLE DISCUSSING RACE RELATIONS AT WORK: 56%

- **I FEEL WELCOME AND INCLUDED WITHIN MY TEAM**
  - I AM CURRENTLY COMFORTABLE DISCUSSING RACE RELATIONS AT WORK: 75%
  - I AM NOT CURRENTLY COMFORTABLE DISCUSSING RACE RELATIONS AT WORK: 62%

- **MY IDEAS ARE HEARD AND RECOGNIZED**
  - I AM CURRENTLY COMFORTABLE DISCUSSING RACE RELATIONS AT WORK: 70%
  - I AM NOT CURRENTLY COMFORTABLE DISCUSSING RACE RELATIONS AT WORK: 47%
In the wake of the 2016 presidential election, Nadia*, a director at an educational services firm, met with her team in Chicago to draft a letter to leadership asking that they sanction a conversation about the election at work. “Employees were feeling neither safe nor welcome, at the office or in their daily lives,” she recalls. “We needed a forum to help people feel better.”

The company’s leaders didn’t end up sanctioning a forum, but Nadia found one in the monthly meetings held by her fellow Diversity and Inclusion Advocates, employees who, in addition to their day jobs, help coworkers navigate conflicts around difference. As an Advocate herself, Nadia had grown adept at difficult conversations: she’d eased the distress one woman felt about the display of gay pride flags on her coworkers’ desks, and she had led the campaign to invest in a new front door to the office that was wheelchair accessible. After the election, she found enormous relief in taking her own questions about race relations to the other Advocates.

“I was struggling with whether or not to wear a safety pin as a gesture of solidarity,” she explains. “I remember asking my black colleagues, ‘Is it really so offensive to wear one?’ And my colleague answered, without sounding at all confrontational, ‘What you just said is kind of ignorant, because for years this [discrimination] has been what it’s like in America, and only now that it’s in your face are you saying, ‘This is not my country!’’”

For Nadia, who grew up Jewish among evangelical Christians in Kansas, finding herself among coworkers whom she can learn from and be open with is what keeps her at her current employer—even if some of the conversations can be difficult. “I’ve never encountered this anywhere else I’ve worked,” she says. “That I can have these conversations with people I work with makes this a good place for me.”

BLACK PROFESSIONALS FEEL MORE INCLUDED, SUPPORTED, AND COMMITTED

The ability to discuss race relations at work would trigger a spectrum of positive outcomes for black employees. Overall, many would feel more included by (and committed to) their employers.

Discussing race relations at work would make me (black employees) feel...

| NET POSITIVE EFFECT | 51% |

1. INCLUDED/SUPPORTED BY MY COLLEAGUES
2. MORE TRUSTING OF MY COLLEAGUES/TEAM
3. ABLE TO BE MYSELF AT WORK
4. WILLING TO WORK HARDER THAN I NEED TO (“GO THE EXTRA MILE”) FOR COMPANY SUCCESS
5. MORE COMMITTED TO MY EMPLOYER, LESS INCLINED TO LEAVE
6. EAGER TO ADVANCE TO THE NEXT LEVEL

CREATING A FORUM ORGANICALLY

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WHEN COMPANIES ADDRESS RACE RELATIONS PUBLICLY, THE BRAND BENEFITS

Companies enjoy another bottom-line benefit from responding to racial injustice: burnishing their public brand. The effect of companies’ proactivity is especially pronounced for black and Asian individuals. Robust majorities are inclined to view companies more positively for having called out racial discrimination.

Millennials are more likely than other Americans to...³⁵
- Be aware of CEOs having taken public positions on controversial issues
- Feel favorably toward CEOs who speak out
- Say they will buy from companies whose CEOs take a public position they agree with

CORPORATE ACTIVISM THAT DOESN’T TARNISH THE BRAND

Corporate donations can be interpreted as political statements. But on closer scrutiny, most donations by large organizations are an extension of their business models—even when it comes to race relations.

Take Google’s decision in February 2017 to donate $11.5 million to community organizations combating racial injustice. Widely reported as a donation to Black Lives Matter, the money instead supported nonprofit watchdog organizations that create better data on practices prone to racial discrimination—a move aligned with Google’s business model of developing nuanced, reliable data sets. As Justin Steele, who heads Google’s philanthropic efforts, told USA Today, “We believe better data can be part of the solution.”³⁶

Another example: Green Bay Packers head coach Mike McCarthy and the Packers organization donated $100,000 each to the Green Bay Police Foundation. This was more about community unity than a statement about “blue lives.” True, McCarthy’s father was a police officer in Pittsburgh. But the statement from Mark Murphy, president of the Packers organization, clarifies their intent to support a program that unites fans: “[W]e really need [a] program like this that bring[s] people together, bring[s] communities together, particularly public safety and community members, and [allows people] to really start listening to each other and having a discussion instead of trying to win the debate.”³⁷
“Silence is Endorsement” E-mail from Sylvia Ann Hewlett

To: CTI Task Force Members

Regarding the predicament of black men and women in the wake of last week’s wrenching events, it is time for corporate leaders to take a stand.

At CTI, we have a model. When we published our LGBT research in January, we persuaded CEOs in our Task Force to speak up and speak out against discrimination against gay and transgender people. With robust research and compelling case studies, we made clear that to say nothing was tantamount to endorsing misguided legislation, legislation that was demonstrably bad for business. In contrast, we showed that to assert inclusion as a corporate value won over not only LGBT individuals as top talent but also as consumers with $3.7 trillion in buying power worldwide. Six months later, securing basic rights for black men and women requires a similar response. The country is in agony. Now is not the time for business leaders to remain silent.

When leaders stay mute on the topic of racial discrimination, on or off campus, they signal indifference or—worse—complicity. As boycotts of Coca-Cola and Target make clear, silence sends a message, and it is one your company can ill afford, particularly when you are working with us to brand yourself as an inclusive workplace and Employer of Choice among people of color.

All of you recognize the formidable business case to be made around retaining black Americans as consumers—consumers with buying power estimated to be $1.2 trillion this year. With our findings on the relationship between diversity, innovation, and market growth, our members are likewise aware that until and unless managers master the art of inclusion, all the innovative potential of diverse teams will go untapped—a colossal missed market opportunity. A record number of you have leapt at the opportunity to sponsor forthcoming CTI research on bias in the workplace.

So: can your leaders afford NOT to join Tim Cook, Marc Benioff, and Mark Zuckerberg as champions of inclusion and human rights warriors?

We would not presume to tell senior management what to say but, similar to the frameworks presented in our LGBT study, we can provide guidance on the spectrum of options organizations can consider.

• “When In Rome” model: Encourage managers to acknowledge the angst and sadness some of their team members may be experiencing by simply asking questions: how are you feeling, how do recent events show up for you here, in the workplace?

• “Embassy” model: Foment an internal dialogue with all employees and communicate where you stand as an organization.

• “Advocacy” model: Suggest solidarity by issuing statements from your CEO via your organization’s public channels. Display symbols of support on your organization’s public platforms. Advertising agency Wieden+Kennedy turned its homepage into a #BlackLivesMatter message.

Your communications teams and legal teams can help you drive the appropriate efforts. But all of us at CTI would be failing in our mission to support you in your D&I mission if we didn’t call you to action. Implore your C-suite to show their commitment by using their voice, whether in corporate town halls or in the national public forum.

As we found in our LGBT research, legislation alone cannot safeguard liberty for all. Corporations increasingly play a role. It is our sincere hope that, in the wake of a rising tide of deaths, both black and white, we not return to “business as usual.” It is our hope that business leaders insist otherwise.

If you are seeking advice about what your organization can do, please contact us.

Urgently,

Sylvia Ann Hewlett and the Center for Talent Innovation
All Staff E-mail from Peter Kraus, [former] CEO

To: Alliance Bernstein employees

It is a sign of the disturbing and tumultuous state of our world today that we're witnessing a steady stream of acts of terrorism, violence and hatred against a broad spectrum of people all over the world. Only recently, we've experienced the worst mass shooting in history in the US, specifically targeting the LGBTQ community, and a rash of racially charged killings of black men and police officers in Louisiana, Minnesota and Texas. Internationally, there have been scores of terrorist attacks in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Libya, Turkey, Belgium and France – their third in the past 19 months – that have killed hundreds and injured thousands. And this is not even an exhaustive list.

Sadly, the rate and randomness of these vicious attacks is only accelerating, which is sure to add to our sense of unease, wherever we are in the world. I want to assure you that these events, and how they affect the lives of AB employees everywhere, weigh on the minds of our senior leaders here at AB, just as they weigh on our community at large. We are colleagues – but even more important, we are fellow human beings. And we can find ways to help each other through these challenging times.

One way is to embrace the momentum we've been building here at AB in ensuring that our core values of diversity and inclusion inform our culture. Events unfolding in the world that feel removed to you could be hitting very close to home for a colleague across the world—or across the hall. Seeing one another through a lens of diversity and inclusion makes us feel more connected and secure in the workplace, things we sorely need to get through these trying times.

Cultivating a culture that encourages diversity of thought plays an important role in this as well. If we feel we can both share and take in differing points of view, we're more likely to give others the benefit of the doubt and practice greater empathy. In an uncertain world, we have to feel safe with our colleagues. Let's all work to get better at modeling these behaviors we want to see in others.

This is also a good time to leverage our Employee Resource Groups (ERGs). We have seven of them: AB Asians, AB OUT (for LGBTQ employees), the Black Employee Resource Group (BERG), SynERGy (the women's ERG with chapters in the US, APAC and EMEA), US Families ERG, Working Parents (Japan) and the Veterans ERG. In these groups, you can share your thoughts and feelings in a supportive environment. You can also learn how colleagues are experiencing the world’s recent events differently from you – an eye-opening experience that enriches our relationships with others here at AB.

There are other avenues to explore as well. You can reach out to your manager, our Human Capital team, our Employee Assistance Program (EAP), our Diversity and Inclusion representatives or our Ombuds. If you need help, please ask for it. At AB, we take the welfare of our people very seriously. We will respond to your needs, with whatever degree of discretion or confidentiality you request.

We can't make sense of senseless acts, but we can control how we respond as individuals and as a firm. We are a global family. Let's lean in to one another, with strength and compassion. Let's resist the urge to shut down or avoid uncomfortable conversations. Let's open our hearts and minds to one another instead. Please know you have my full support during these difficult times, and that of all of AB's senior leaders as well.

Regards,

Peter Kraus
Interpublic Group memo from Michael Roth, CEO

To: The Organization

It's getting to be all too common, and deeply sobering, to reach out within our organization in the wake of another act of violence that shakes our confidence in basic humanity and justice. Yet, once again, after last week's tragedies in Baton Rouge, Minneapolis and Dallas, it's important that we connect, affirm our commitment to one another, and acknowledge the pain being felt in so many of our communities.

The aftermath of the shootings of two Black men underscores the fact that we, as Americans, have yet to solve deep, systemic racial problems. The demonstrations that have followed the recent shootings reflect the degree to which African Americans and people of color are fearful for themselves and their families. That's a concern for all of us, just as we can all condemn the fatal assault on police officers who were protecting peaceful protesters. Because we are aware of the day-to-day commitment and the heroism that we see from so many people in law enforcement, who perform extremely difficult jobs with both dignity and humanity. The bottom line is that lives have once more been needlessly lost and we are all confronted with another tragic opportunity to deal with biases that are leading to heartbreaking results across our country.

Times like these are a stark reminder of the fact that the issues surrounding diversity and inclusion can be deeply charged and painful to people who we live and work alongside every day. As we all go back to work this Monday morning, let's keep in mind that the emotions associated with these incidents are intense and many among us will carry these feelings into work. The world doesn't stop at the door to our offices, and the issues surrounding race are at play here too, as they are in all areas of our society.

As always, we need to be compassionate and open to understanding each other. In light of recent events, that's even more important. Some among us will need help in dealing with the impact of what we've witnessed over the past week. Yet raising your hand to ask for help, or having those conversations, is often very difficult. We all need to do our best to consciously contribute to an environment and a culture that's accepting of different perspectives, and accepting of different world views — so that it becomes safe to have these difficult conversations.

Only by putting our personal discomfort aside, so that we can hear and empathize with others, can we begin to change the destructive dynamic we once again saw play out last week. It's vital that we all do our part and demonstrate our continued commitment to embracing diversity and actively practicing inclusion. We should also commit to continuing to produce work that embodies these values, since the ideas we create can have such a profound impact on changing popular culture.

Thank you,

Michael Roth
ABOUT THE AUTHORS

ELLA BELL SMITH is a professor of management sciences at the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth College. Previously she held appointments at the Belk College of Business Administration, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, and MIT's Sloan School of Management. She has served on the faculties of Yale's School of Organization and Management, and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. She was a visiting scholar-in-residence at the Bunting Institute, a research center for women at Radcliffe College and Harvard University. Professor Bell's research has focused on the career advancement of all women and building their leadership capacity. She is considered by the industry and the academy to be one of the leading experts in organizational change, and the management of race, gender, and class in organizational life. She has published widely in management journals and is coauthor of Our Separate Ways and the author of Career GPS. Bell received her Ph.D. in organizational behavior from Case Western Reserve University.

SYLVIA ANN HEWLETT is an economist and the founder and chief executive officer of the Center for Talent Innovation, where she chairs a private sector task force of 86 global companies focused on fully realizing the new streams of talent in the global marketplace. She also codirects the Women's Leadership Program at the Columbia Business School. She is the author of 14 Harvard Business Review articles, 12 critically acclaimed nonfiction books including Winning the War for Talent in Emerging Markets; Forget a Mentor, Find a Sponsor (named one of the best business books of 2013); and Executive Presence (an Amazon “Best Book of the Month” in June 2014). In 2014 she was recognized as the Most Influential International Thinker by HR Magazine and honored by the European Diversity Awards with its Global Diversity Award. Hewlett, who has taught at Columbia and Princeton Universities, earned her BA at Cambridge University and her Ph.D. in economics at London University.
MELINDA MARSHALL, executive vice president and senior editor at the Center for Talent Innovation, drives the Center’s research on innovation, sponsorship, and leadership. She has coauthored articles for the Harvard Business Review, including “How Diversity Can Drive Innovation” and “The Relationship You Need to Get Right” and CTI reports including Innovation, Diversity, and Market Growth as well as Sponsor Effect 2.0. The coauthor of Ambition in Black and White: The Feminist Narrative Revised, she led the Center’s research on women and ambition, which culminated in Women Want Five Things, a study of women’s ambition and relationship to power, as well as Black Women: Ready to Lead. A journalist, editor, and former national humor columnist, she has published eleven books in collaboration, and is the author of the award-winning Good Enough Mothers: Changing Expectations for Ourselves. She earned her Master’s in human rights studies at Columbia University and is a magna cum laude graduate of Duke University.

TREVOR PHILLIPS, cochairman of the Center for Talent Innovation, is a British writer and television producer. He is cofounder of Webber Phillips Ltd, a data analytics provider. Phillips is the president of the Partnership Council of the employee-owned retailer John Lewis; he is the first nonpartner to be elected by the 90,000 workforce since 1928. He is also currently the deputy chair of the Steering Committee of the National Equality Standard and chair of Green Park Diversity Analytics. Phillips is the former chair of the UK Equality and Human Rights Commission. He had previously been the chair of the Commission for Racial Equality and the elected chair of the Greater London Authority. His most recent work for TV is “Has Political Correctness Gone Mad?” following up his successful documentary “Things We Won’t Say About Race That Are True.” The programs, which he wrote and presented, attracted over three million viewers, as well as extensive press coverage. He is currently writing a prequel to his successful book Windrush. Born in London, Phillips was educated in London and in Georgetown, Guyana, and studied chemistry at Imperial College London.
TAI WINGFIELD is senior vice president of communications for the Center for Talent Innovation, driving reputation and branding efforts on behalf the organization. In this role, Wingfield built the communications platform for the organization, forging solid media relationships and securing multiple front page New York Times and Washington Post stories, increasing online following and engagement, and developing ways to present the organization’s analytical results visually. Wingfield also liaises with the internal communications teams of CTI’s Task Force members to devise and execute strategic diversity and inclusion efforts, strengthening relationships with CTI’s 86 member companies. She is the coauthor of the CTI report, Black Women: Ready to Lead and Harvard Business Review article, “Qualified Black Women Are Being Held Back from Management.” With more than ten years of experience as a seasoned public relations specialist, Wingfield has effectively counseled public and private organizations on various issues including diversity and inclusion initiatives, brand reputation management and awareness, minority outreach, and human rights. Wingfield graduated from the University of Maryland with a BA in Communication with an emphasis in Public Relations.

RIPA RASHID is managing partner at Hewlett Consulting Partners and executive vice president at the Center for Talent Innovation, specializing in global talent strategies. She spent over a decade as a management consultant with leading global firms including Booz & Company, PwC, and Mitchell Madison Group, and held senior positions at MetLife and Time Warner. Rashid is coauthor of Winning the War for Talent in Emerging Markets: Why Women Are the Solution (Harvard Business Review Press, 2011), Asians in America: Unleashing the Potential of the “Model Minority,” the book, Growing Global Executives: The New Competencies (Center for Talent Innovation, 2015), as well as numerous reports and whitepapers. Rashid has lived and worked in North America, Europe, Asia, and South America, and speaks four languages. She earned an AB cum laude in astronomy and astrophysics from Harvard University, an MA in anthropology from New York University, and an MBA from INSEAD.

21Mary-Frances Winters, We Can’t Talk About That at Work! (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2017).


26Microsoft, Twitter post, July 8, 2016, 6:11 a.m., https://twitter.com/microsoft.


Genpact
Brinda Murty
NV “Tiger” Tyagarajan

GlaxoSmithKline
Ann Bohara

Goldman Sachs
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Google
Karen Sumberg

Hewlett-Packard
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** Steering Committee

As of May 26, 2017
CTI’s flagship project is the Task Force for Talent Innovation—a private-sector consortium focused on helping organizations leverage their talent across the divides of gender, generation, geography, and culture. The 86 global corporations and organizations that constitute the Task Force—representing nearly six million employees and operating in 192 countries around the world—are united by an understanding that the full utilization of the talent pool is at the heart of competitive advantage and economic success.