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A Guide to Racial Equality in the Workplace

DEI Experts Offer Solutions to Create a Radically Inclusive Workplace

Companies have traditionally pushed for a line of separation between politics and work. However, recent events have prompted a surge of activism and call for systematic change against racism in the U.S. The days of political-neutral offices are behind us.

Corporate America can no longer sit on the sidelines of social causes and wait for others to combat racism and oppression. In fact, people have set a much higher standard for how companies handle diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). The days of writing policies and hoping they'll work are over; it's time for systematic change where DEI is not something that lives on paper, but exists as part of your company's DNA. It must be learned, talked about and acted upon all of the time, for the rest of time.

Without introspection and change, however, companies will struggle to truly achieve a diverse and equitable workplace. And without this, they will also fail to retain and attract the talent they need to grow their business and be successful. **A lasting investment in your workplace's future starts with the people function. Still, it must be so impactful it takes hold inside of the company and remains at the forefront.**

As a leader of people teams, you must foster the necessary changes within your organization to build a workplace free of racism and oppression. However, that's easier said than done. That's why we put together this guide — to help people professionals navigate the process of building a truly anti-racist workplace culture that permeates the organization, is empowered by its people and championed by every leader.

Read on to learn from experts how listening, learning and educating can help you make long-term changes within your own organization.

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LISTENING

One of the most important steps in the process of building an equitable workplace is to listen. Hearing from those who have the experience and knowledge to teach you about a topic is key to learning more about it.

At Built In, we recognize that we too have a lot to learn on the topic of racism in the workplace. That's why we reached out to a group of experts to not only hear what they have to say, but amplify their knowledge to others who may need it.

These are the stories of the people who work towards making change in their organizations every day.

How to Support Employees in Being Radically Inclusive

While DEI is a collective effort in most organizations, HR and talent professionals are often the drivers of how to educate and make change within the larger workforce. They are key players in removing racism and oppression from their own organizations.

To help you get started on this journey, we spoke with **Michelle Y. Bess, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Director at Sprout Social**, for her insight and advice.

Here's how you can support your organization and employees on the journey of being radically inclusive as told to Built In by Michelle Y. Bess.

How can organizations start to support employees in being radically inclusive?

Before thinking about specific tactics or initiatives, it's important to take a more holistic approach and think about system-level change — what I typically refer to as equity.

The concepts of diversity and inclusion are symptoms of the fact that we don't have systems built for Black, Indigenous and People of Color (**BIPOC**), women and all underrepresented groups. You must take a step back and think about how to change the overarching system.

My friend, Xavier Ramey CEO of Justice Informed, promotes having a radical imagination for diversity, equity and inclusion to enact change. To do this, you need to ask yourself, **what are the big ideas we can come up with to do something different?** It's what product teams do every day, and it's how DEI should be thought about too.

After taking a step back to think holistically, you need to build a system of learning in your organization about the history of racism and oppression.

Anyone can learn about these topics independently, but what's powerful and radical is creating a way to learn and discuss this history together on a consistent basis. No matter how you decide to foster these ongoing discussions, it's imperative your leadership team participates and encourages employees to do the same.

DEFINITION

BIPOC

Black, Indigenous and People of Color

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In short, organizations must embrace these three methods when supporting employees in being radically inclusive:

- Think holistically

- Think about equity

- Be big and bold

What specific tactics should organizations consider to support radical inclusivity?

Here are some actions every organization can take to support its employees in being radically inclusive.

✓ Build an Inclusive Onboarding Process

All companies have an onboarding process, but many forget that this orientation of new employees is an act of inclusion. Take a look at your current onboarding process to consider how you can make it more inclusive of People of Color and other underrepresented people.

Think about how colleges and universities support students who are the first in their families to go to college; these individuals are also going to be moving into the corporate space for the first time. How can you support them?

Universities build wrap-around services like bringing in the students early to do a session together, orient them to the campus and meet other students. Corporations should do something similar, such as a session on how to be successful at work.

Onboarding is about making your culture, which is often implicit, explicit. It should explain your values, what you expect of employees and provide resources for success. Orienting all employees in the same way helps everyone start out on a more equal playing field.

Intentional Outreach to BIPOC Employees

Mentorship and leadership programs that are open to all employees are great, but if you want to focus specifically on developing BIPOC employees, **you have to be intentional in how you set up the program and promote it to employees.**

Research shows that women don't go after opportunities in the same way men do. Similarly, People of Color often approach opportunities in different ways. When launching a mentorship or leadership program, even if it's open to everyone, take the extra step to encourage BIPOC employees and leaders to participate. Something as simple as, "Hey, this program is happening and I think you would be great for it," could be the little encouragement they need to participate.

Train and Teach Hiring Managers

We've all heard the phrase, "employees don't leave companies, they leave managers." **Many daily interactions happen at a team level, so you must train managers on how to manage across lines of difference.**

Use Project All-Calls

Instead of going directly to your favorite person or the person you know can get a project done well, I encourage leaders to do an all-call.

This will open up the project to everyone and allow you to incorporate more diverse voices into the work. You will likely be surprised by who signs up to help; it isn't always the people you would have gone to normally.

Use Open-Ended Questions

Asking someone if they watch *The Office* could automatically exclude them from the conversation if they don't watch the show. However, asking the same question in a way that allows for more than a yes or no answer offers a better chance for the respondent to connect in the conversation; something I, as a Black woman, am always looking for.

Instead, try asking, "What shows are you currently watching?" **This mitigates the individual's worries over whether or not they'll be understood or if their answer will be accepted.** It also gives you the chance to learn more about the individual.

Recap: Tactics to Support Radical Inclusivity

- ✓ **Build an Inclusive Onboarding Process**

- ✓ **Intentional Outreach to BIPOC Employees**

- ✓ **Train and Teach Hiring Managers**

- ✓ **Use Project All-Calls**

- ✓ **Use Open-Ended Questions**

How can change be implemented long-term into an organization's work culture?

Similar to what I shared earlier, you can't think about change as an initiative or a tactic; it must be about replicable, system-level change. Here are a few ways you can start to do this:

Hold Yourself Accountable

Companies can be more accountable for change if they publish a metrics-driven diversity report. You likely have metrics everywhere else in the business — your equity efforts should as well. Tracking these metrics and allowing others to see how you're progressing will help you make this a long-term investment and hold your organization accountable.

Here are just some of the metrics you should report on:

- How many People of Color do you have?
- How many women do you have?
- How many LGBTQIA+ employees do you have?
- How many employees with these identities do you have on each team?
- How about in each department?
- How many of them do you have at each level of leadership?
- What does mobility look like for BIPOC/underrepresented employees?
- What is your attrition rate for these employees?

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Conduct an Inclusion Survey

While it's important to know your organization's demographic data and report on it, you must also understand how employees are experiencing your culture. An inclusion survey is a good way to get this information.

From the survey, you should determine whether or not your BIPOC employees are experiencing your culture differently. If so, you need to think about why and how you will address this.

The findings from this survey should speak to the idea of **intersectionality** from Kimberlé Crenshaw. Instead of looking at your employee data on race and gender separately, you must examine how Black women or queer People of Color on your sales team experience your culture. Looking at these layers will help you better understand how every employee experiences your culture.

What advice would you share for having conversations about race at work?

There is no better time to start talking about race than right now. Almost everyone is paying attention to these conversations and wants to learn. However, there are a few things you should do before you begin talking about racism and oppression in your workplace.

> *"There is no better time to start talking about race than right now. Almost everyone is paying attention to these conversations and wants to learn."*

Establish Psychological Safety

When a group of people are working together for the first time, an icebreaker is often facilitated to help everyone get to know each other. Something similar should occur in your organization to **build a level of trust amongst your employees before having conversations about race.** This will establish psychological safety in your workplace and allow for more open discussions.

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Identify Community Agreements

Companies should also set up norms or **community agreements** prior to any discussions as a way to **set clear expectations and define parameters for how your organization is going to talk about race.** It allows all employees to level-set and commit to how they will operate in this space.

Define Your Leader's Why

Conversations about race in the workplace aren't successful without leadership buy-in. Before fostering any discussions about race, leaders must define and share with their employees why the organization is going to talk about race.

The following questions should be addressed:

- Why is this topic important to the leader personally?

- How does it align to the business?

- What are the **norms** the company is following?

- How are leaders going to hold employees accountable to focus on the conversations and not shy away from them?

After you've set the foundation, you can begin having conversations about race in your workplace. Start with conversations about the history of racism and oppression, and anti-Black racism more specifically.

During your discussions, you may find employees trying to move away from race as the central topic. As leaders, it's your job to recognize why this may be happening and get the conversation back on track.

If you think employees need a break from discussing race, there are many other session topics you can choose, like the systemic oppression of underrepresented genders or individuals with disabilities, which are all connected to race in some way.

The best thing you can do as a leader is to share how the topics you're discussing are related to one another and relevant to your business every day.

How can HR and people teams ensure BIPOC employees have the same development opportunities as others?

As I mentioned before, it is important to have developmental programs that are open to all employees, but I also recommend you **have a program built specifically for BIPOC employees.** Here's why:

People of Color need unique leadership opportunities because they see and experience the world through a different lens. Race impacts the way a person is going to lead and the way that people perceive their leadership.

When I'm talking or presenting, I try to be as authentic as possible, but I still have to manage myself; if I'm too passionate or too energetic, it can be misconstrued as being aggressive. So I have to be passionate, direct and friendly. I smile a lot when I'm talking and I do that not only because I'm a happy, warm person, but I also know that it makes me less threatening.

Another example of this disparity is how Asian people are the second highest demographic of race/ethnicity in tech, but they are still one of the lowest percentage of leaders in the tech industry. It doesn't make any sense that 30-40% of engineers identify as Asian, but there are so few Asian CTOs or product leaders; it's because they reach the **bamboo ceiling.**

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*People of Color need unique leadership opportunities because **they see and experience the world through a different lens.** Race impacts the way a person is going to lead and the way that people perceive their leadership.*

MICHELLE Y. BESS
DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION
DIRECTOR AT SPROUT SOCIAL

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These are the things that you can talk about in a program that's just for BIPOC employees, that aren't always going to be relevant in a larger program.

Beyond a developmental program specifically for BIPOC employees, here are some other ways you can help them develop. These should be standard throughout your organization to begin with, but making a concerted effort to provide these for BIPOC employees is vital.

Timely, Consistent Feedback

Leaders should always be giving feedback, no matter how uncomfortable the conversations may be. I see a lot of People of Color early in their careers not getting feedback early or often enough. Yet, People of Color don't have the same leeway to mess up; they get tested and White people get coached.

Leaders and managers must make corrections and provide feedback right away to determine if the person can be coached.

Waiting until it's too late to share feedback has even more negative implications for a person of color than it does a White person.

Personalized Management

Giving people what they need is equity too; which is why you should not be managing everyone on your team in the exact same way. **As a manager, you should be asking People of Color what they want out of their career.**

Once you know what they want or the different skills they're trying to learn, you need to tailor your coaching toward these goals; give them different projects to work on or introduce them to people they can learn from.

Cross-Functional Opportunities

Often People of Color will only work on certain teams like in a support role or entry-level sales. To mitigate this, build cross-functional teams when working on new projects.

This will allow BIPOC employees to learn about new parts of the business and other opportunities within the organization. It also benefits the entire company because everyone is able to work with people that are different from them.

Priority Hiring

If you are truly working towards radical equity in your organization, you must consider the fact that for a century it was legal to not hire someone because they were Black. Given this fact, **it is absolutely appropriate for you to prioritize hiring People of Color because our country didn't hire them for a century.**

This forced People of Color to not have enough money to go to college, gain skills, access a network or wealth — all of the things that set up a person for success. We know underrepresented people don't lack skills and talent, what they lack is access and being given a chance. If you're pushing for radical equity, this is how you should be thinking.

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What are some of the biggest mistakes companies make when trying to support a more radically inclusive culture?

#1: Asking your BIPOC employees to lead the change

Reaching out to a Black employee and asking them to lead your DEI work because of their identity is unacceptable. It is rude and insensitive to expect People of Color to do that kind of **emotional labor**. If you need employee support, open up the opportunity to the entire company and see who raises their hand to help.

#2: Not putting any money behind the work

When you contact outside speakers or training facilitators, lead with the budget in your ask. This will mitigate the awkward discussion of payment for the practitioner. If you share that your company only has $1,000 to work with, the practitioner will respect that and decide whether or not the opportunity is right for them.

#3: Only offering unconscious bias training

Companies often host an **unconscious bias** training session and think that is all they need to do. That is only the very bare minimum of what needs to be done. **You must create a learning program that builds upon each lesson, connects back to your workplace and revisits topics often.** Even if you can't do back-to-back trainings, commit to a learning series that includes a session on anti-racism, and anti-Black racism specifically.

#4: Leaders don't ask their people what they want

Leaders often look at what other companies like Facebook or Google are doing and replicate it; but what worked for them is not going to work for every company. **Instead of replicating another company's efforts, ask your people what they want and start there.**

You may think the best place to start your DEI efforts is with diversity because it's most important to your company's brand, but that may not be what your Black employees care about most. Instead, they want to have a better sense of belonging in your organization and opportunities to grow their career. Asking employees what they want will help you set the right priorities and make the biggest impact.

#5: Thinking one initiative is enough

A lot of companies will ask, "We started including pronouns in our email signatures — isn't that good?" Yes, that's great, but what about your queer People of Color? How are you addressing them? Or people may say, "We already talked about race, isn't it over?" No, it's not because **race impacts people's lives everyday, and as we've seen again recently, it is literally life or death.**

Many companies are now giving employees Juneteenth off, which is a nice gesture, but the more important question is do they have any Black leaders? Solely giving your employees the day off and not looking internally to see how you can do better is problematic. If you are not intentional, it will become like any other holiday where people use it as a vacation and do not recognize its significance.

Companies may also say, "We marched in the Pride parade, we've done the work." While they paid thousands of dollars to a group organizing Pride, people who identify as LGBTQIA+ did not get that money. It's a good branding opportunity for the company, but did it help you hire any transgender leaders or change the experiences for LGBTQIA+ employees?

Companies should be acknowledged for their good work, but must remember there is always more work to do. You need to ensure the work you're doing is actually helpful and effective for BIPOC individuals.

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Recap: 5 Biggest Mistakes Companies Make

1 Asking your BIPOC employees to lead the change

2 Not putting any money behind the work

3 Only offering unconscious bias training

4 Leaders don't ask their people what they want

5 Thinking one initiative is enough

Conclusion

No matter if you're just starting out in building a radically inclusive workplace or further along in the process, choose one action that you believe will work well at your organization and do it. **You know your organization best so don't be afraid to take these recommended actions and modify them slightly to fit your culture and values.**

The best thing you can do as a leader is to start the work, set up a foundation for your employees to do the same, encourage others to participate, and continue to invest and show up to do the work everyday.

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Building a Successful Unconscious Bias Training Program

A key element to building a radically inclusive workplace is an unconscious bias training program. We sat down with an expert to learn the ins and outs of building and facilitating an unconscious bias training to help you get started.

Here's how you can build a successful unconscious bias training program as told to Built In by **Tarsha Mccormick, Head of Diversity & Inclusion at ThoughtWorks**.

Why is unconscious bias training important for fostering racial equality in the workplace?

Unconscious bias is one small piece of a much larger framework of fostering equality in the workplace. Understanding the roles that unconscious bias and privilege play in racial equality in the workplace is foundational to this larger framework.

Research has shown that a standalone unconscious bias training program is not effective at creating a diverse, equitable and inclusive workplace.

To be more effective, the training should be part of a larger, strategic Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) plan that is **inclusive of training and education, recruitment, retention, support, leadership development, as well as benefits and policies.**

A strategic DEI plan is essential to fostering **racial equity** in the workplace, particularly for employees from underrepresented racial and ethnic communities.

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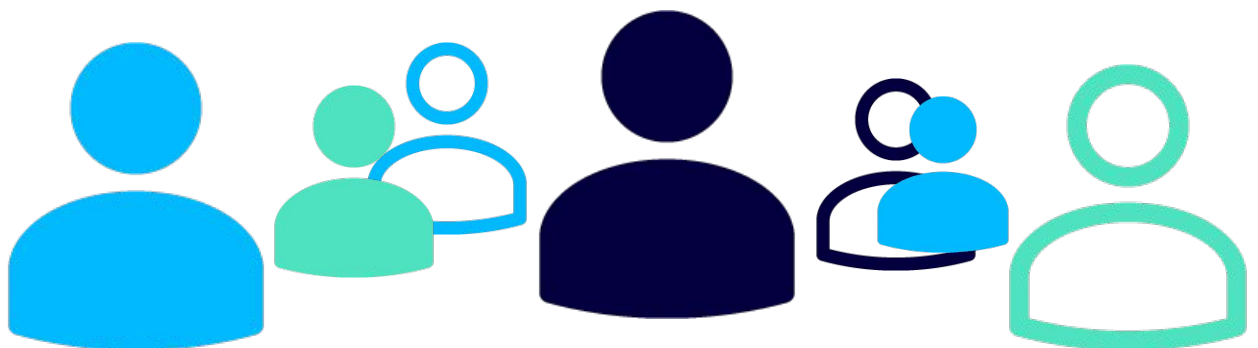
How can HR and people teams be more aware of unconscious biases that exist in their workplace?

Bias occurs at every level of the organization and can impact the full life-cycle of an employee's career with your organization from their recruitment process all the way to how they exit your organization.

Only recruiting or sourcing candidates from certain universities, not having diverse interview panels and using different language to describe a group of employees, are all examples of unconscious biases in the workplace.

It is important to be thoughtful about the words we use when discussing employees, particularly those from underrepresented communities.

For example, there is a lot of research related to the language that people use when providing feedback to men and women. Oftentimes we use an agentic communication style when referring to men, using phrases like, "they are responsible for the success of the project," "they drove it," or "they are the go-getters."

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*Bias occurs at **every level of the organization** and can impact the full life-cycle of an employee's career with your organization — from their recruitment process all the way to how they exit your organization.*

TARSHA MCCORMICK
HEAD OF DIVERSITY & INCLUSION
AT THOUGHTWORKS

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And with women, we tend to use a communal style of communication. Phrases like, "they are supportive" and "they were helpful in the success of a project." ==Thinking about the words you use to describe your employees will help mitigate unconscious bias in your workplace.==

Another example is the language that is used in job descriptions. The language can attract or detract candidates for a role. Phrases like, "We're looking for a rockstar" tend to be more associated with men, whereas phrases like "We're inclusive. We look for aptitude, attitude, integrity. We look at your experience as well as your potential," often attract a more diverse candidate pool.

Women apply to jobs when they meet 100% of the criteria, while men will apply if they meet just 60%.

Source: Harvard Business Review

WOMEN

100% OF CRITERIA MET

MEN

60% OF CRITERIA MET

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Suggestions for HR and people teams include:

1. Doing a holistic assessment of their organization to **identify areas where they can mitigate bias in the workplace**, and then actively work on a plan to address potential concerns.

2. Take an intersectional look at your diversity metrics. What story does it tell? **The data will often help you identify potential areas to explore more deeply.**

3. **Conduct regular inclusion and engagement surveys** to gain a better understanding of concerns and challenges facing your workforce.

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What best practices would you recommend for building an unconscious bias training program?

My preference has always leaned towards in person facilitation, but this is not always possible, especially given the current need for social distancing. Video conference based training can also be effective as long as the session is engaging.

Start with your business leaders and those who are primarily responsible for making employment related decisions that impact hiring, compensation, promotions, advancement, etc.

Leaders should go through the training first so they can begin to consider potential changes that need to be made within the organization, ways to mitigate bias in the workplace and how to best support their employees.

Next level managers along with HR, people and recruitment teams should be included in the second wave of training, before rolling it out to the rest of the organization.

As far as the content of the training itself, a good starting point is a discussion about what unconscious bias is and where it comes from. It should also include a discussion about ways unconscious bias can impact the workplace - recruiting, compensation, opportunities and even your diversity and inclusion efforts.

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I always challenge participants (especially leaders), at the end of my sessions to identify at least one thing that they or their teams can do to mitigate unconscious bias in the workplace.

Make sure your training is a part of a larger training program with courses offered at a regular cadence.

Here are some other course ideas you can build out:

- A more in-depth, 201 version of unconscious bias training

- What is intersectionality?

- What does it mean to be a good **ally**?

- What is privilege?

- Racial equity and equality

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Thinking about ways to make your unconscious bias training a part of a training series will help your organization continue to grow and build upon each subject. It will also help to prevent you from shying away from having difficult conversations about unconscious bias, privilege, allyship and race.

Ideally your workforce would attend an unconscious bias course at least once a year. This allows employees to get a refresher on the topic and sets aside a space for discussing unconscious biases they may have uncovered since the last training. It also helps employees consistently think about ways they can be more inclusive on their own teams.

Who should facilitate unconscious bias training?

There is no one-size-fits all answer to who should facilitate unconscious bias training. **Internal and external trainers, as well as computer-based learning modules are all potential and viable options.**

If you are just starting to think about offering an unconscious bias training and you don't know where to start, an external facilitator is a great option. You can always consider a train-the-trainer session with internal facilitators who would then be able to lead the sessions going forward.

Training an internal facilitator allows time for the facilitator to get comfortable with the content and is also a great way to offer ongoing sessions to employees throughout the year.

If your organization chooses to use an internal facilitator, they should meet the following criteria:

- Knows the science behind unconscious bias

- Is passionate about the topic

- Can engage participants

- Makes participants feel at ease to share their own unconscious biases

- Is vulnerable in sharing their own experiences

Even if you do have an internal facilitator who meets all of these requirements, you should keep in mind that some of your employees may feel more comfortable with an external facilitator or a computer-based training.

While we all aim to have workplaces that are diverse, inclusive and foster a sense of belonging where everyone has a voice and feels comfortable to openly share, **if we are honest, we all still have a lot of work to do in this space.**

When you couple this with the subject matter, some participants may feel uncomfortable speaking openly in a session led by a member of your HR or D&I teams.

Computer-based training could work best for larger, remote and widely distributed organizations. Ultimately, organizations should choose the option that best suits their culture and training goals in order to yield the best results.

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Conclusion

Unconscious bias is a part of human nature, so it is something that we all have. Although we all have some form of unconscious bias, we also have the ability to mitigate bias. This can be done by allowing ourselves to pause for a moment to make an intentional and conscious decision instead of going with our brain's automatic and unconscious response.

The beauty in discovering your biases is that it gives you the power to make conscious decisions which can really impact positive change.

As an Unconscious Bias Awareness training facilitator, one of the takeaways that I always share with participants is that you are not responsible for your first thought — this is the brain's automatic response. You are however responsible for your second thought, your first action and every thought and action thereafter.

This is the intentional side of the brain. Once you see or discover an unconscious bias, you cannot unsee it. You now hold the power to make a conscious choice, so how you choose to respond is solely up to you.

How One Company is Building An Anti-Racist Workplace

Building an anti-racist workplace is possible with a lot of hard work and a continued commitment to dismantling racist systems in everything you do. We sat down with leaders at Fractured Atlas to hear how their organization continues to work towards this goal every day.

Here's how to start building an anti-racist workplace as told to Built In by **Lauren Ruffin, Co-CEO & Chief External Relations Officer** and **Tim Cynova, Co-CEO & Chief Operation Officer at Fractured Atlas.**

How did you start building an anti-racist workplace culture?

CYNOVA: Our journey began much like many organizations — we were a predominately White organization and wanted to diversify our staff. When I first joined Fractured Atlas 11 years ago, all of the executives identified as White men, and we only had one or two People of Color on staff.

Year after year we continued to put forth a commitment to diversify our staff, yet year after year we failed to make any progress towards achieving that goal.

What ultimately helped jumpstart our organizational efforts toward becoming an anti-racist organization was when two staff members used their annual professional development stipend to attend an Undoing Racism workshop by People's Institute for Survival and Beyond.

The employees came back from the workshop with an idea about how that experience might help Fractured Atlas finally make meaningful progress towards our perennially-stated diversity goal.

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RUFFIN: I think it's important to acknowledge the fact that this was a staff-driven initiative made possible through personal development funds that each staff member receives annually. A lot of organizations don't have professional development stipends, or for organizations that do, they don't necessarily understand how an employee's work can benefit from an anti-racism workshop.

Regardless of whether we're talking about for-profit or nonprofit entities, **one of the biggest challenges for an organization is to determine how to embed anti-racism principles into its mission.** If your staff and audience doesn't see anti-racism as a core part of your mission, you won't ever be able to build an anti-racist workplace.

CYNOVA: As a White man in a formal position of leadership, **making a commitment to being an anti-racist organization is both a professional and a personal journey**, and it's a journey that will never be completed in our lifetime.

It's heartening to see companies publishing statements of solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement. Just six months ago, we were more often met with "Why?" when we talked about becoming an anti-racist organization. Now more leaders are coming with "How?" questions.

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CYNOVA: Part of the "how" for White leaders is that you must commit to personally learning about White privilege, **White fragility**, and constantly educate yourself about racism and oppression and how it manifests itself in the organization you built and help run.

From an HR or people perspective, you need to reflect on your organization's policies and procedures and come to terms with the fact that the policies you love might inadvertently be racist and oppressive. This requires you to question everything you do through an anti-racism lens, and then be intentional in continuing to co-create a workplace where everyone can thrive.

> *"Part of the "how" for White leaders is that you must commit to personally learning about White privilege, White fragility, and constantly educate yourself about racism and oppression."*
> **-TIM CYNOVA**

And to be truly successful, this commitment can't just live in the form of a "Chief Diversity Officer." Everyone needs to own the work so that it is embedded at the DNA-level of an organization.

RUFFIN: Keep in mind that you can't force your employees to be anti-racist, but you can strongly request that they work on it as a part of your company's mission. And that's key to making this work. **Your senior leaders must buy-in to the change.** If they're not committed, it will be nearly impossible for your organization to become anti-racist.

Once they've committed, leaders must hold all employees accountable to doing the work to become an anti-racist workplace. One thing to remember is that your employees of color are watching, and they always know which of their White colleagues aren't fully committed to learning, growing, and transforming the workplace.

What are some of the things you did to build an anti-racist workplace culture?

Race-Based Caucusing

CYNOVA: Our organizational anti-racism journey has taken twists and turns, and we've had missteps and surprises. Early on we began with a yearlong relationship working with an outside facilitator who helped us learn and focus on systems of oppression. Then we worked with a different facilitator for another year to look at how racism was embedded in much of what we do and how we operate.

CYNOVA: These facilitated relationships lead to the launch of our monthly staff, race-based caucuses that have now been occurring for over four years

For White staff members the monthly caucus, or affinity group, is a place where we can learn, wrestle with, and challenge ourselves and each other around the issues of racism and oppression. We discuss how racism shows up in our organization and lives, and ultimately how we can be better colleagues and allies to our coworkers of color.

> *"Leaders must hold all employees accountable to doing the work to become an anti-racist workplace."*
> **-LAUREN RUFFIN**

RUFFIN: When you hold something like a race-based caucus every month, the importance of your leadership committing to change comes into play. A few years ago we had some employees who were not participating fully in the white caucus and some who weren't going at all. Our leaders made sure to hold those employees accountable, which was an important signal that our leaders are committed to change.

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Built A Non-Hierarchical Leadership Team

RUFFIN: The evolution of our four-person, shared, non-hierarchical leadership team happened organically about four years ago as the organization's founder and CEO was preparing to leave the company.

Not wanting to accept the conventional wisdom that you replace one CEO with another CEO, the four of us on the leadership team engaged in deep conversations about the nature of leadership, the function of the CEO role and if there were other ways to construct this function in alignment with our commitment to anti-racism and anti-oppression.

Fortunately, our Board of Directors were willing to engage in these conversations and experiment with a new plan, so we set off on this shared leadership team journey.

This leadership model is no longer about having one person sitting in a position of power making all of the final decisions; it became how we might work intentionally together, and across teams, to support one another and make the best decisions for the organizations in service of our customers and mission.

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*Your **senior leaders must buy-in to the change.** If they're not committed, it will be nearly impossible for your organization to become anti-racist.*

LAUREN RUFFIN
CO-CEO & CHIEF EXTERNAL RELATIONS
OFFICER AT FRACTURED ATLAS

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Became A Fully Remote Workforce

RUFFIN: The switch to becoming a fully remote workforce was also very organic. It began when employees started relocating to places outside of the New York City area, where our physical office was previously located. We then began hiring people who didn't live in NYC, while at the same time, those working in our physical office started increasing their work from anywhere days.

As our office lease was coming to an end, we started to think more intentionally about how we could acclimate everyone to be a part of a fully distributed team. Beyond that, a fully virtual workforce allows us to provide a unified experience for everyone, rather than the bifurcated in-office vs. remote culture we had to previously try to maintain.

CYNOVA: Centering work around a physical office, and spaces that are often located in expensive geographic areas, can be limiting and, frankly, oppressive.

Until recently, when countless offices were forced to be remote almost overnight, most organizations didn't give a lot of thought to how they worked and the physical structures that either hinder or help their staff.

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Created A Fixed-Tier Compensation Structure

CYNOVA: Since almost the beginning of Fractured Atlas we operated using a strict, fixed-tier compensation structure. Everyone at a given tier makes exactly the same compensation — regardless of tenure — and that number is totally transparent.

No compensation system is perfect. However, too many are influenced by one's ability to negotiate or be friends with those making the compensation decisions.

> *"In maintaining a system that says, everyone makes exactly the same, we start to address traditional pay disparities."*
> **-TIM CYNOVA**

In maintaining a system that says, everyone makes exactly the same — and everyone in the organization has access to exactly the same benefits — we start to address traditional pay disparities. Again, it's not perfect, but it's a structure that we feel best aligns with our anti-racism and anti-oppression commitment.

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RUFFIN: By having a fully remote workforce and a fixed-tier compensation structure, we're taking a stance on paying people the salary they deserve no matter where they are located. The conversation currently taking place as large companies make plans to hire remote workers seems a bit backwards to me, with them framing living in less expensive cities as both a perk for employees and cost-savings for employers.

Companies are also saying that **remote work opportunities are a means of increasing diversity** by allowing them to recruit aggressively in cities with a large population of Black professionals, such as Atlanta. However, doing this may actually create a scenario in which Black workers outside of the Bay area are underpaid compared to technologists located in the headquarter offices.

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Recap: Tactics For Building an Anti-Racist Workplace Culture

- ✓ **Implement Race-Based Caucusing**

- ✓ **Adopt a Non-Hierarchical Leadership Teams**

- ✓ **Transition to a Fully Remote Workforce**

- ✓ **Create a Fixed-Tier Compensation Structure**

CYNOVA: # Here are some other things we've done, and continue to do, to build an anti-racist workplace:

- Mandatory and regular all-staff trainings focused on aspects of our anti-racism and anti-oppression commitment.

- Mandatory crucial conversations trainings to help people develop the ability to engage in and navigate challenging conversations. This was something we felt was necessary if we were going to require staff to discuss racism and oppression in the workplace.

- Conducted an accessibility and disability audit of our workplace, our processes, and the software we build and use.

- We are in the process of reviewing the paid holidays the organization observes. In providing paid time off for holidays we're implicitly adding our "seal of approval" to days celebrating or honoring events that might conflict with our anti-racism and anti-oppression commitment.

- Following each meeting of our Board of Directors, we share the entire Board packet, unredacted, with all staff members.

- **We created a Google Form to accept anonymous questions from staff members prior to our monthly all staff meetings.** During those meetings, we respond to the questions with members of the leadership team, or other appropriate representatives, answering each and every question.

  Not everyone is comfortable raising their hand in front of all of their coworkers to ask the CEO a question. Creating an anonymous form creates a more inclusive environment for people to add their voices to the conversation.

- **Adopted the Objectives & Key Results (OKR) framework to increase transparency, accountability, and alignment throughout the organization.** Ultimately, OKRs make it easier for everyone in the organization to know who is working on what, and how their own work helps the organization achieve its objectives.

- **Implemented unlimited paid vacation days, as well as paid sick days as a way to accommodate employees who may have chronic conditions.**

- **Created financial systems so that no staff member needs to "front" money for work-related expenses.**

How have your hiring practices changed to adhere to your anti-racist culture?

CYNOVA: One of the first areas we focused on in our journey was our hiring process. We had previously spent years creating and refining our hiring process until it was a finely-tuned machine. Then, as we started to examine how people moved through the process, and where and how people exited it, **we discovered that some of what we built was working against our anti-racism and anti-oppression efforts.**

Here are some of the things we did after evaluating our hiring process through our anti-racism and anti-oppression lens:

Job Descriptions

CYNOVA: Research shows that White men apply to roles when they meet about 60 percent of the qualifications listed in a job posting while women and People of Color typically only apply if they meet closer to 100 percent of the listed qualifications.

To help us connect with more diverse candidates who might otherwise not apply for a position because they didn't think they met all the criteria we listed, **we started posting job openings at different levels with the intent of hiring the final candidate at the higher level.**

CYNOVA: The goal is to attract those who might not apply for a position as it's fully outlined but actually possess the knowledge, skills, and abilities to be successful in the role. When we begin interviewing candidates they typically aren't disappointed to find out it's a more senior role and offers a higher salary. This tactic allows us to connect with great candidates who otherwise might not have applied.

We also do not include any educational requirements in job postings. This information doesn't really tell us much about how a person will do in the role — we're not hiring for rocket scientists or brain surgeons. We also list the salary in the job post so candidates don't have to guess or waste their time, and ours, interviewing for a position that doesn't meet their expectations.

The Interview Process

CYNOVA: The traditional interview process is often filled with myriad biases; which is problematic. When we realized that our interview process had issues that were working against our anti-racism and anti-oppression commitment, **we had to deconstruct and reassemble the entire thing, looking at every component individually.**

And many years later, this is still an evolving, work-in progress. You learn, you adjust; the environment changes, you iterate.

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CYNOVA: # Some of the things we've done to iterate include:

- **Anyone involved in our hiring process must complete our core curriculum course on "How We Hire."**

  This helps them understand their own biases, and how and why our hiring process was constructed. We then use three or four reviewers or interviewers to help us adapt for bias.

  You can't "unbias" people, but you can build a process that recognizes where bias tends to appear and understand how to adjust for it.

- **We built a structured interview process.**

  Every question or scenario we ask is tied directly to helping us identify if a candidate has the specific knowledge, skills and abilities to be successful in the given role. Every candidate is asked the same questions, in the same order, by the same person.

  This highly structured process mitigates the bias of an interviewer liking a candidate more than another simply because they went down an off-topic rabbit hole and "just feel like they know the person better." The reality is that someone who bikes as a hobby has nothing to do with their abilities to fulfill the finance role they applied for.

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When we realized that our [interview] process had issues that were working against our anti-racism and anti-oppression commitment, **we had to deconstruct and reassemble the entire thing,** *looking at every component individually.*

TIM CYNOVA
CO-CEO & CHIEF OPERATION OFFICER
AT FRACTURED ATLAS

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- **We publish our anti-racism commitment in every job posting and discuss aspects of it in every interview.**

  Candidates receive at least one question in every interview about racism, oppression and inclusion. We'll ask candidates things like, "What is your definition of diversity without using the word 'difference'?" Or, "How do you promote sensitivity and inclusion in the workplace?"

  The answers to these questions help us determine if they've done the personal work necessary to join us on our anti-racism journey. A candidate could be incredibly talented in every other way, but ultimately won't be successful working for our organization if they haven't done the personal work.

- **We focus on hypothetical questions, not situational ones.**

  Instead of asking a candidate to "Tell us about a time…" (which can be biased towards those who haven't had that specific opportunity), we ask them how they would approach a hypothetical situation. These hypotheticals are often based on real-life scenarios someone in the position would encounter and there are no "right" answers.

  This framing allows candidates who might not have had the opportunity to experience a certain scenario the chance to share how they would address it. This is also a way we start to build trust, a crucial component of high performing teams and virtual workplaces.

- **All of our interviews, even before we moved to being a fully-virtual organization, were conducted by phone or video.**

  This helps to equalize the experience for both candidates and those conducting the interviews. Doing this eliminates situations that could introduce bias, like that casual conversation as we walked candidates to the elevator, or a candidate who might be late because they encountered transit delays while traveling two hours to our office.

What advice would you give to companies who are just starting to build an anti-racist workplace culture?

RUFFIN: People need to be aware that having a sophisticated understanding of systemic racism and oppression is no longer a luxury, it's the most important, core leadership value of our time.

White people can start a professional journey toward a greater learning about these systems in the workplace, but **to really make progress they need to do the work at home as well.** This isn't just something to think about from 9 to 5, it's life or death for your Black and Brown colleagues. It's more than one or two training sessions, it's a lifetime worth of work.

> *"As leaders, you must get it right and set an example for your workplace. You have to spend time learning on your own."*
> **-LAUREN RUFFIN**

But the good news is you don't have to tackle it all at once. And it can be fun, especially if you are a curious learner. There are plenty of really educational anti-racism training programs available. If you embrace the learning opportunity you will become a more nimble and intelligent human being.

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CYNOVA: There is no neutral here. ==You're either working towards becoming an anti-racist workplace or you're supporting the systems and structures that uphold racism and oppression.== As leaders, it is a core responsibility of ours. It's no longer a "nice to do." It's a leadership and organizational liability if you don't.

If you're not constantly learning and trying to make your organization a place where everyone can thrive, you're failing in your leadership capacity. A lot of leaders and organizations want to be anti-racist, but aren't committed to doing the work and staying in the struggle when things get tough. It can be uncomfortable at times but you must embrace it.

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Conclusion

A decade ago, people wanted to work for Fractured Atlas because it was an innovative arts and technology organization. What many people don't realize is that the journey to become an anti-racist organization is itself just as innovative.

You're creating something new — and in many cases unique — from systems and structures that were built for a few to succeed into ones where everyone can thrive.

And just like any evolving foray in innovation, some people who might have been critical to earlier iterations won't want to stick around for subsequent ones.

You may say goodbye to some, but you'll welcome others who want to be a part of what's next. **This is the journey your company needs to be on and, if it hasn't already begun, it needs to start today.**

SECTION II

LEARNING

As discussed frequently in the previous section, a big part of building a culture of racial equality is learning. You must not only work to educate yourself on the history of racism and oppression but help your workforce do the same.

We put together a list of articles, tools, books, podcasts and much more to help you get started on this journey. Remember, this list is just the beginning; in order to truly be successful in changing your workforce, you must make a lifelong commitment to learning.

Articles

- HBR: **How Businesses Must Take Meaningful Action Against Racism**

- HBR article series: **Toward a Racially Just Workplace**

- **Who Gets to Be Afraid in America?** By Ibram X. Kendi

- **The Intersectionality Wars** by Jane Coaston

- **97 Things White People Can do for Racial Justice** by Corinne Shutack

- Advice from Dr. Erin L Thomas: **Active Anti Racist Corporate Commitments to Consider**

- **How to Be an Ally if You Are a Person with Privilege** by Frances E. Kendall

- **10 Steps to Non-Optical Allyship** by @mireillecharper

- **White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Backpack** by Peggy McIntosh

- **How White People Can Be Better Allies to the Black Community** by Jackie Saffert

- **How to Manage Your Team in Times of Political Trauma** by Michelle Kim

- Refinery29: **Your Black Colleagues May Look Like They're Okay — Chances Are They're Not**

- **The Shooting Of Black Americans Started Long Before The Looting** by Taryn Finley

- **What We Get Wrong About 'People of Color'** by Jason Parham

- **How "People of Color" Evolved From A Gesture of Solidarity and Respect to A Cover for Avoiding the Complexities of Race** by Rachelle Hampton

- **Why We Need to Stop Saying 'People of Color' When We Mean 'Black People'** by Joshua Adams

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Websites, Toolkits & Resource Lists

- **Talking about Race** web portal from the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture

- Barack Obama's **blog post**, **toolkit**, and **ways to get involved**

- Community Tool Box: **Learning to be an Ally for People From Diverse Groups and Backgrounds**

- Instagram: **How to be actively Anti-Racist**

- New York Times: **An Antiracist Reading List**

- Google Doc: **Anti-Racism Resources for White People**

- **How to be A Strong White Ally**

- **Why is this Happening?** 100 Year Hoodie's list of resources to educate

- Tayo Rockson's **Things to do to Support Black Lives & Protestors**

- **Guide to Allyship**: An evolving open-source guide created by Amélie Lamont to help you become a more thoughtful and effective ally

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Books

- ***White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*** by Robin DiAngelo

- ***How to Be Anti-Racist*** by Ibram X. Kendi

- ***Me and White Supremacy: Combat Racism, Change the World, and Become a Good Ancestor*** by Layla F. Saad

- ***Race, Work and Leadership: New Perspectives on the Black Experience*** HBR compilation of essays that examines how race matters in people's experience of work and leadership.

- ***The Person You Mean to Be: How Good People Fight Bias*** by Dolly Chugh

- ***So You Want to Talk About Race*** by Ijeoma Oluo

- ***Courageous Conversations About Race*** by Glenn E. Singleton

Podcasts

- **Seeing White** a 14-part documentary series by Scene on Radio host and producer John Biewen, looks at the racial structures of America, focusing on dissecting the oppressors rather than the oppressed.

- **Pod Save the People** organizer and activist DeRay Mckesson explores news, culture, social justice, and politics with fellow activists Brittany Packnett Cunningham and Sam Sinyangwe, and writer Dr. Clint Smith. They offer a unique take on the news, with a special focus on overlooked stories and topics that often impact People of Color.

- **Code Switch** fearless conversations about race that you've been waiting for! Hosted by journalists of color, our NPR podcast tackles the subject of race head-on. We explore how it impacts every part of society — from politics and pop culture to history, sports and everything in between. This podcast makes ALL OF US part of the conversation — because we're all part of the story.

- **The 1619 Project** is a New York Times audio series, hosted by Nikole Hannah-Jones, that examines the long shadow of American slavery.

SECTION III

GLOSSARY

To make the most of this guide, it's important you understand the terms that are discussed throughout. This glossary defines many of the terms you may not have heard of before that are mentioned in this guide. Save this Racial Equity Tools Glossary to learn about other terms you may come across in your continued learning.

The terms are listed in alphabetical order and you can click on each term to see the source of the definitions.

Ally

Someone who makes the commitment and effort to recognize their privilege (based on gender, class, race, sexual identity, etc.) and work in solidarity with oppressed groups in the struggle for justice. Allies understand that it is in their own interest to end all forms of oppression, even those from which they may benefit in concrete ways.

Bamboo Ceiling

Is a term used to describe the specific obstacles and barriers that Asian Americans face in reaching the upper echelons of leadership and management.

The result of this "bamboo ceiling" is the lack of leadership representation amongst Asian Americans, even though they, as a group, are far more likely to have a college degree than the general population, according to a 2011 study by the Center for Talent Innovation.

Further, they have little trouble getting hired, but representation is significantly reduced at the senior management levels—for instance, Asian Americans account for only 1.4 percent of Fortune 500 CEOs and 1.9 percent of corporate officers overall.

BIPOC

Is an acronym for 'Black, Indigenous and People of Color.' The term is used to highlight the unique relationship to whiteness that Indigenous and Black (African Americans) people have, which shapes the experiences of and relationship to white supremacy for all People of Color within a U.S. context.

Community Agreements

A consensus on what every person in the group needs from each other and commits to each other in order to feel safe, supported, open, productive and trusting so that educators can serve our students (or clients) well, do our best work, and achieve our common vision.

Emotional Labor

The management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display.

Intersectionality

Per Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, "Intersectionality is simply a prism to see the interactive effects of various forms of discrimination and disempowerment. It looks at the way that racism, many times, interacts with patriarchy, heterosexism, classim, xenophobia — seeing that the overlapping vulnerabilities created by these systems actually create specific kinds of challenges.

Simply, it is the exposing of one's multiple identities to help clarify the ways in which a person can simultaneously experience privilege and oppression. For example, a Black woman in America does not experience gender inequalities in exactly the same way as a white women, nor racial oppression identical to that experienced by a Black man. Each race and gender intersection produces a qualitatively distinct life.

Norms

Norms are the agreements we make with each other. They represent community goals, and as such all classroom members should be given the opportunity to contribute to their creation.

Racial Equity

Racial equity is the condition that would be achieved if one's racial identity no longer predicted, in a statistical sense, how one fares. When we use the term, we are thinking about racial equity as one part of racial justice, and thus we also include work to address root causes of inequities not just their manifestation. This includes elimination of policies, practices, attitudes and cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes by race or fail to eliminate them.

Unconscious Bias

Or Implicit Bias is often defined as prejudice or unsupported judgments in favor of or against one thing, person, or group as compared to another, in a way that is usually considered unfair. Many researchers suggest that unconscious bias occurs automatically as the brain makes quick judgments based on past experiences and background.

As a result of unconscious biases, certain people benefit and other people are penalized. Although we all have biases, many unconscious biases tend to be exhibited toward minority groups based on factors such as class, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, nationality, religious beliefs, age, disability and more.

White Fragility

Per Robin DiAngelo, white fragility is "a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable [for white people], triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium."

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