RACISM MATTERS

ERADICATING RACISM IN THE CORPORATE WORLD
INTRODUCTION

For corporations seeking to be more diverse and inclusive the tragic killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and others brought the outside crashing in. It ignited a time of reckoning, first in the US, but now around the world.

Corporations are thinking now, what does this mean for us?

We have a responsibility not just to make our businesses successful but also to do our part for bettering the lives of clients, customers, and employees both as a producer of products and services and as the creators of jobs and career opportunities.

We may not be able to solve this on our own but it’s in our realm to care for our people, to make sure their voices are heard, to provide equal pay and access to equal opportunities to work, contribute, and succeed.

Today, only 3.2 percent of executives and senior manager-level employees are African American.1 Only 5 Fortune 500 CEOs are Black2 and none of these are women. This is in our jurisdiction. What happens on our watch is our responsibility. And we must act now to do something about it.

It is in this spirit that Korn Ferry recently launched a series of webinars to talk about this issue and how we can solve it. It might sound naïve, but we have no choice but to look at ourselves in the mirror and ask how we will eradicate racism in the corporate world.

This point of view was inspired by those discussions.

1 Source: Center for Talent Innovation, December 2019
2 Source: Fortune.com 2020
HEAR ME
Black voices on their pain and anger
Four Black professionals from three different generations share what the recent killings and those of many other Blacks throughout their lifetimes means for them and their families.

STAND BY ME
How Whites can become authentic allies
White privilege has always been difficult to explore. But without accusation this article discusses how Whites can leverage racial privilege to be effective allies for achieving equity.

IN MY SHOES
Addressing systemic racism through structural inclusion
The emphasis of diversity and inclusion over the past few years has been to tackle people’s behavior with unconscious bias training. But, while worthwhile, it’s not enough. In this article we discuss how organizations are tackling the systemic racism in their existing talent systems.

DON’T TALK, DO
Creating a racially equitable future as inclusive leaders
Organizations need CEOs to be champions of racial equity. But to lead their businesses to become truly inclusive and equitable they also need to be highly skilled in a multitude of ways. We discuss what inclusive leadership looks like in action.

SUSTAIN CHANGE
Eradicating racism in your organization
Five areas to focus on to build a diverse, equitable, and inclusive organization.
Until recently, corporations seemed to have rejected racism as a serious problem. But while diversity and inclusion has been championed in organizations across the globe, Blacks are still underrepresented in leadership and management and feel they are not treated equally and do not have a voice.

We want to explore what business leaders at all levels can say and do to tackle racism within their organizations. And that must start with listening to and hearing black voices on their own experiences—at work and in the wider world.

We brought together three generations (Boomer, GenX, GenZ) of black Korn Ferry employees to share their personal stories and perspectives of racism. The conversation addressed the issue through three key questions:

- How do you feel?
- What do you need?
- What are your hopes for the future?

Panelists

AUDRA BOHANNON
Senior Client Partner

NIA-IMANI HESLOP
Analyst

MICHAEL C. HYTER
Chief Diversity Officer

JT SAUNDERS
Senior Consultant

GARY BURNISON
CEO
HOW DO YOU FEEL?

Audra Bohannon
My heart is heavy, and it’s been heavy for a while.

Nia-Imani Heslop
It makes me think back to all the racism I encountered at school and at university. There are so many stories, but I’ll tell you one that I remember particularly. It was my graduation day, 2017. And I was so happy because it was the end of four long, hard-fought years. But in the car on the way there, I get an email from my university’s police department which informs me that an African American male, who was himself only three days away from graduating, has been killed by another student in a racially motivated stabbing. So as I’m there celebrating my accomplishments, and trying to be happy, I also have to think about the fact that could have been me, could have been one of my brothers, could have been my best friend. That could have been any of us.

JT Saunders
I am thinking of an incident when I was 18 years old. I had just bought my first car and was out riding with two African American friends when I was pulled over—at a drive-through window, believe it or not. One of the police officers drew his gun and directed it at me as he approached. And I have to tell you, I wasn’t a kid who got into trouble. That was the first time I ever saw a gun. That was the first time I ever saw a gun pointed at me. In that moment, I realized how frightened, how shocked, how powerless I was. Now I have a daughter who is almost driving age herself. She wants to go out in the world and be independent and get her first car. But I am scared for her, because no matter how far you come in the world the color of your skin makes you a target. I realize that having a college education and living in a good community doesn’t take away the possibility that it could happen to her too.
Michael C. Hyter

We’ve always been concerned about my stepson. He’s a basketball player. A really tall kid. So there was always this worry that he would be perceived as older than he is. We first had the “race conversation” with him when he was 13 years old—and we continued to have it with him two or three times a year. Still, there’s always this fear every time he’s out of the house. He was away at college when my wife and I moved into the neighborhood we’re living in now. When he came home, my wife felt she needed to send an email to all the homes in our neighborhood to let people know that this is our son, that he likes to jog and that, if they see him around, he belongs here.

NO MATTER HOW FAR YOU COME IN THE WORLD THE COLOR OF YOUR SKIN MAKES YOU A TARGET. I REALIZE THAT HAVING A COLLEGE EDUCATION AND LIVING IN A GOOD COMMUNITY DOESN’T TAKE AWAY THE POSSIBILITY THAT IT COULD HAPPEN.

A BLACK MAN IN THE US IS 2.5 TIMES MORE LIKELY TO BE KILLED BY POLICE THAN A NON-HISPANIC WHITE MAN.

Source: Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences August 2019
Audra Bohannon
I think we’re all feeling pain, anger, rage, frustration. I’ve been working in the corporate world for a long time now and talking to people in many organizations that look just like me. And the stories we’re sharing here today are universal. It is really tough out there.

And it’s not just about what’s going on in the world either. It’s about how it shows up within the corporate world as well. I’m telling you, if I walk into almost any company and ask them “How many black folks do you have at the senior level?”, you’d be able to count the answer on one hand. What’s that saying? That we’re not smart enough? That we don’t have the potential? That we were born stupid? No. This is the product of racism, inside and outside corporations, which translates into low expectations, truncated mobility, and lower representation for African Americans at higher levels.

And I’ve got one more thing that causes me to be tired. If you’re someone who uses the phrase “qualified minorities” then I really wish you’d let it go. Because when you say qualified minorities, do you also say qualified white people?

JT Saunders
We’ve worked on some projects together, Audra, and I’ll never forget a quote that one of the executives shared with us. He said:

“I can’t afford to have a bad behavior day.”

It’s this idea that I have to show up and prove my worth every day, even if I’m not feeling my best.
IN A RECENT KORN FERRY STUDY NEARLY 60% OF BLACK P&L LEADERS REPORTED HAVING TO WORK TWICE AS HARD—AND ACCOMPLISH TWICE AS MUCH—in order to be seen on the same level as their peers.

Source: The Black P&L Leader, Korn Ferry, November 2019
WHAT DO YOU NEED?

Audra Bohannon
One of the things we talk about a lot in our organization is the power of choice—a choice for people to engage with each other, to understand that black folks have just as much potential as anybody else, to believe in our capability to do outstanding work at the highest levels within an organization.

I need evidence and demonstration of the belief in black talent.

Nia-Imani Heslop
I agree that belief is important. But I also think it’s about giving people like me a chance.

Give me the opportunity to show you that I have the capability.

RECENT KORN FERRY RESEARCH FOUND THAT BLACK P&L LEADERS MATCH OR EXCEED KORN FERRY’S BEST-IN-CLASS LEADERSHIP BENCHMARK.

Source: The Black P&L Leader, Korn Ferry, November 2019
Nia-Imani Heslop

As someone who is new to the firm and new to corporate America, what I need to see are visible black leaders. I need to see people who look like me above me so I know that I can accomplish what they did. On my third day here, I remember looking around and seeing Audra and JT and the other African Americans in the room. At that point, I felt I could breathe and relax, knowing that there was hope for me to rise in this organization.

At the same time, I need our leaders to want—and to be able—to work alongside us to make change happen. We all know change doesn’t come quickly. We have seen so many protests over the years about horrific acts done to African Americans, and we’ve seen so many people come out and make public statements. But it’s one thing to talk. It’s a different thing to act. I think, this time, corporate America has the capacity to make that structural change.

Michael C. Hyter

At this point I want to turn to Gary, our CEO and leader. Gary, as someone who has always been so supportive of our movement, let me ask you: how are you feeling and what do you think needs to happen now?

Gary Burnison

I’m feeling all sorts of emotions. I’ve been listening to you, listening to my colleagues with tears in my eyes. I’m not black and I don’t know what it means to be black. I don’t know what it means to have a gun pointed at me. I don’t know what it means to be discriminated against. What I do know is that racism exists and that this is unacceptable. We have to be honest with ourselves. There needs to be change, and I encourage every CEO to drive that change. This is one thing that you cannot outsource. Change has to come from CEOs who, let’s face it, are largely white. It has to come from the top down and it has to be intentional.

Michael C. Hyter

Thank you, Gary. I am hopeful that change will happen. It feels to me like circumstances are different this time around. Do people agree with me and, if so, why do you think that is?
JT Saunders
What’s different for me is that many people are now thinking about how they can advocate, support, and serve as allies for people who don’t have a voice. To me, that’s inspiring. That is the beacon of hope. This is our moment to build self-awareness, within and outside of corporations, and then to follow that awareness with direct action.

Audra Bohannon
I’m with you 100%. The only thing I would add to what you said JT is that I’ve seen more white folks involved in these protests. I’ve seen people saying that silence is unacceptable. So it’s a different level of engagement, even though it feels like just one more time.

Nia-Imani Heslop
Yes, and it’s happening not just in the US but globally. All around the world, people are seeing that racism is racism and that racism is wrong. People are standing alongside their African American friends and colleagues and fighting it together—and that allyship is important.

Michael C. Hyter
One thing I think that has helped is that these events have been caught on camera. There was the Central Park incident, where there was an obvious weaponization of the police by a white woman who was faking distress. It was seen by millions of people because it was on tape. Then less than a week later, we all saw that police officer with his hand in his pocket and his knee on George Floyd’s neck. I think it has enabled people who are not Black to connect the dots. The curtain has been pulled back and people are horrified by what they see.
WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES FOR THE FUTURE?

Audra Bohannon

My hope is that we will not be silent any longer. My hope is that this is a tipping point. My hope is that we can all commit to making it better and that we refuse to go back or to maintain the status quo. I think an important part of that is learning to appreciate difference. No matter how different people are, you treat them with appreciation. You don’t just tolerate them.

JT Saunders

For me, I’m hoping that people hear us, that they recognize the authenticity of our experience, and that this serves as a catalyst for change. That could be large-scale change. It could also be incremental change—because change never happens overnight. But what I don’t want is for six months or a year to pass by and forget about George Floyd and this just becomes another day. I want this to be the point where we dig our heels in and make a stand. I also hope it allows us to develop the means and the language to have conversations about the historical legacy of what racism has done to this country and how it shows up today.

Nia-Imani Heslop

I think we’re all agreed on the need for real and authentic change. I don’t have kids yet. But I want them one day. And I don’t want them to have to go through what I went through as a child. I don’t want them to have to listen to someone calling their sister a monkey to her face. I don’t want them to have to go through the experiences my parents went through or that everyone here has gone through. I want us all to leave this conversation invigorated, knowing that, wherever we are in our journeys, we can make a change that has a lasting effect.
What is white privilege? How does it manifest in and out of the workplace? And how can white people leverage their privilege to become effective allies for achieving equity?

These are issues that can be difficult and emotional to explore. But Whites, like it or not, are the beneficiaries of a system in which Blacks remain underrepresented, unfairly treated and, often, unheard. It is therefore important that white people are part of the conversation on systemic racism—a conversation in which everyone must be prepared to examine their own assumptions and behaviors, willing to listen and learn and take action.

We brought together a panel of Korn Ferry colleagues—Black and White—to explore these complicated issues in more detail. Excerpts from that discussion are shared below.

Panelists

**STAND BY ME**
How Whites can become authentic allies

**GARY BURNISON**
CEO

**AUDRA BOHANNON**
Senior Client Partner

**PEGGY HAZARD**
Senior Client Partner

**DOUG MAXFIELD**
Senior Client Partner

**LOUIS MONTGOMERY, JR.**
Practice Leader

**CATHI RITTELMANN**
Senior Client Partner
Gary Burnison

This has been an emotional time for all of us. It reminds me of a quote from Edward Everett Hale. Somebody sent me this a while ago and it’s taken on new meaning for me over the last three weeks or so. It says: “I am only one; but still I am one. I cannot do everything; but still I can do something; and because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do the something that I can do.” I think that really sums up my attitude and many attitudes here in America and around the world. And I think the something we can all do starts with being vulnerable. You have to listen. You have to understand. You have to try to put yourself in somebody else’s shoes. That’s what this conversation is all about.

Peggy Hazard

Thanks Gary. The truth is that most of us white folks are not comfortable talking about race and privilege, especially with our black colleagues. Even those of us in the D&I field have often avoided straight language because we didn’t want to cause offense or shut people down. But it is critical that we talk with each other and acknowledge reality.

Let’s start by discussing what white privilege is. There was a recent story in the news that you have probably all heard about by now. It is the story of a white woman, Amy Cooper, who was walking her dog in Central Park. The dog was off the leash, which is against park policy, and a black man, Christian Cooper (no relation), asked her to abide by the policy and leash her dog. The woman responded that she would call the police and tell them an African American man was threatening her—and she did. Now I’d like to ask my colleagues: how did you react to this when you saw it?

Cathi Rittelmann

This was an interesting evolution for me, unfortunately. When I first saw the clip, I started immediately rationalizing. I thought: she’s scared and people do things that are not very smart when they’re scared. And then I heard the reactions of my black friends and colleagues, which were so markedly different… sadness, anger, rage. So, I picked up the phone and asked them, “what am I missing?” and the answer changed my whole point of view. My heart hurts just thinking about it.

The truth is, I have rallied against the concept of white privilege throughout all my years of diversity and inclusion work. But now I have to face it: it exists. There are things I benefit from that black people do not. And I need to figure out how to use that privilege differently.
Louis Montgomery, Jr.

As a black person, I personalized it. I imagined: it could have been me. It hit me hard and I am glad that we, as an organization, are taking this opportunity to educate ourselves about racism as well as to educate and enlighten others.

Doug Maxfield

I have been avoiding the news during the pandemic. So, although I had heard about this video, it was a while before I watched it. When I did, it struck me differently from how I expected. My initial thought had been, well, this is probably just someone saying something stupid in the heat of the moment. But when I saw it, it was very clear that she [Amy Cooper] was using her skin color as an advantage—and using his [Christian Cooper’s] as a disadvantage to him. Thinking about it from his perspective was emotional for me... and continues to be so.

Audra Bohannon

When I saw that video, I was overwhelmed with emotion. So I went back and looked at it again and again to try to understand where my pain and my rage and my anger came from. I came away thinking about the three different levels of white privilege. The first level is when white folks move through the world not thinking about it. It’s like the air you breathe. It’s just part of life. The second level, is when you move through the world knowing you have white privilege and you manipulate it or leverage it in a deliberate way. And then the third level - you have Amy Cooper. She took white privilege to another level because she weaponized it. She behaved in a way that could have destroyed a man’s life. That, to me, is really upsetting and wrong.
Peggy Hazard
I want to reinforce what you said, Audra, about white privilege having different levels, some of which we may not be aware of. I also want to clarify that, by white privilege, we don’t mean “you grew up rich” or “you had it easy”. What it means is that the color of your skin has not added to the challenges of your life. And you may not notice, but you are part of a system that allows you to benefit from that—from the absence of challenges that a black colleague would face.

Now, to explore how this manifests at work, I’m going to invite my panel to react to what should be a positive piece of news and see what they say. So… Congratulations! I’m giving you a promotion! Huge salary increase! How do you feel?

Audra Bohannon
First reaction? I feel great on a couple of levels (not including the salary increase!). I feel the organization is recognizing the work I’ve done and the hours I’ve put in. But then as I reflect on it the feeling is more bittersweet. Now I’m factoring in how other people are going to see it. Are they going to think that I only got the job because I am a—quote—black woman?

I’ve got to process the fact that white folks may not want to work for me.

I’ve got to think about the probability that somebody is going to quit or transfer—or that they might stay and try to sabotage. And the last thing I have to deal with is the stereotypes around black folks and whether or not we’re capable of leadership and whether or not we’re intelligent enough to do this kind of work.

Louis Montgomery, Jr.
Absolutely. Like Audra, I would be—and have been—elated to receive promotions in the past. But even in 2020, you still frequently find that you are the first black person to have been promoted to a certain level or hired into an organization. So as a first, you’re a trailblazer. And, just as Jackie Robinson experienced in baseball, trailblazers have their allies, but they have their detractors too.
MORE THAN 85% OF THE BLACK WOMEN LEADERS WE INTERVIEWED SAID THEY FELT BURDENED TO KNOCK DOWN WALLS AND CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE NEXT GENERATION OF BLACK TALENT.

Source: The Black P&L Leader, Korn Ferry, November 2019

Cathi Rittelmann
It’s interesting. We all look at the world through the lens of how we identify, and gender has always been the lens I see the world through. So there is some interconnectivity with what you said, Audra, in terms of having concerns about whether people will respect you and whether you will have a voice at the table, not just a seat at the table. But what I realize, as we’re having this conversation, is that I never once thought about being a white woman. I think the time has come for us, as white people, to look beyond our silos. What impact does race have on the decisions we’re making in the workplace? What do I own in terms of how we can eradicate racism in the system?

Doug Maxfield
I’ll take that one step further, Cathi. When I get that promotion, “white” and “male” never factor into my processing. There’s just the excitement and happiness about getting it, alongside the natural nervousness about taking on a new job. Having all those other things to think about would be like a couple of 10-pound weights on my ankles. It’s got to be tiring.

Peggy Hazard
Gary, do you have any reflections from your vantage point as CEO?

Gary Burnison
I have many reactions. Number one, I want to see color and I want to talk about it, because I think we have been conditioned to avoid conversations like these. I also think it’s important that we work hard to listen and understand. As an example, when I hear the phrase “white privilege” I have a reaction because I am a white person who comes from a very modest upbringing. But now that I’ve heard the definition, I’m not going to react that way again. I understand that, while I’ve had to work for everything I’ve achieved, I have not had to face the other issues that black people face.

That’s why I think it is liberating that we can have this kind of dialogue.
Peggy Hazard
Next I’d like to talk about allyship. Are we prepared to be authentic and true allies, and, if so, what does that mean? Audra, what does good allyship look like to you?

Audra Bohannon
When I think about the word allyship I think about partnership. An ally will join me in trying to make exciting things happen and will be willing to lean into conversations like these. That takes courage on both sides because black folks are not used to having conversations about race or racism or white privilege with white people—and white people are not used to doing it the other way around.

Louis Montgomery, Jr.
Something happened to me recently that is a great example of allyship. At the end of a conversation I was having with a colleague, he said: “I’ve got a question for you. I’m confused about terminology. Is it ‘Black’? Is it ‘African American’? Is it ‘people of color’? Can you help educate me?” I said to him: “Thank you for the chance to explain. Black or African American are both perfectly fine. Personally, I prefer Black because it is more inclusive.” To me, his interest in better understanding terminology spoke volumes of his commitment to being a great ally, so much so that he inspired me to write a LinkedIn piece called *Now, What Did You Call Me?*, which discusses the evolution of different terminology that has been used over the years to describe Black people.

Peggy Hazard
It’s an important clarification. What I think is important is that an ally says I stand with you, I recognize I have privilege and I want to learn what I can do to change things. With that in mind, I’d like to ask the people on this panel: what do you think you can do as an ally?
**Doug Maxfield**

First thing I think we can do is lean in and learn. Last night at our dinner table with my two teenage daughters, I shared a conversation I had several years ago with my black CEO, who told me that when he goes to the store he gets followed around by the store manager and other employees to make sure he doesn’t shoplift. The CEO! That spurred a great discussion at the dinner table for us. So I think it’s important to have conversations and listen to our colleagues, not to dismiss things just because we haven’t experienced them ourselves.

The second thing we can do is pay attention to our colleagues’ energy levels. I’ve noticed that when new employees come in they’re always excited, they work hard, they’re keen to learn. But then after a while they plateau. When that happens, I suspect that black colleagues do not have the same safety net that white people have. So it’s important that we develop relationships and lean in when performance levels change.

**Cathi Rittelmann**

As white people, we need to leverage our privilege in a different way than we’ve done before. At first, that could be about simply reading and learning. But also it’s about having the courage to speak up. Until recently, we weren’t comfortable even using the word racism. It’s time we started having conversations around micro-inequities and micro-aggressions that we might not see and certainly don’t address.
Louis Montgomery, Jr.
I’ve worked in corporations for a long time and have generally avoided having conversations about race because of all the emotions and issues associated with it. But the fact that I’ve had white colleagues reach out over the last few weeks and say: “Hey, I just wanted to call and check in to see how you’re doing.” That speaks volumes. People that know me know I am a very optimistic by nature—and I am more optimistic now about the opportunity for positive social change than I’ve ever been in my life. I think we are at a real inflection point. It’s going to be uncomfortable, the progress may be uneven at times but I believe we’re on a great journey to address racism in our society and I’m obviously very proud that we’re doing this as an organization.

Gary Burnison
Some final comments from me. I think that CEOs like myself need to own this. We’re used to delegating “the what,” though not necessarily “the how.” But this is different. This can’t be outsourced. This has to start at the top.

What’s critical is opportunity. None of us have any idea what our potential is. I never thought I would be a CEO. I never wanted to be a CEO. But I was given the opportunity. So, as CEOs, we must make sure that there’s equality of opportunity because that is the gateway to growth.

The other thing that’s crucial is sponsorship. If I think about my own career, there were four people that were mentors and sponsors for me. We have to do that as organizations.

So let’s embrace it. But first, let’s be vulnerable. Let’s have the conversation. And let’s lead with our heart, not our head.

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**BE AN ALLY**

- Pay attention to how people are treated and when you see injustice, speak up.
- Understand white privilege and the power it has to bring about positive change.
- Diversify and expand your networks and provide opportunities for untapped talent.
- Reflect on your experience and role in creating more inclusion in your life and society.

Source: Korn Ferry, June 2020. [Click here to see the full infographic.](#)
IN MY SHOES

Addressing systemic racism through structural inclusion

Systemic racism is built into the fabric of society, the economy, and the organizations within it. Our structures and processes were created by Whites for Whites. They carry inherent biases that favor “default whiteness” and create significant barriers for Blacks and other minority groups to succeed and thrive. In contrast, structural inclusion strives to build systems, structures, processes and polices that are inclusive of all.

During this unprecedented period of racial reckoning, Korn Ferry held a panel discussion to examine the issues around inherently racist corporate systems, and what we can do to eradicate them. This article is based on that discussion.

Joining us were:

**MONIQUE MATHESON**
CHRO of Nike, Inc

**ERIC HUTCHERSON**
EVP and CHRO of the NBA

**CONNIE LINDSEY**
EVP and Head of Corporate Social Responsibility at Northern Trust

**ANDRÉS TAPIA**
Global Diversity and Inclusion Strategist, Korn Ferry

**ALINA POLONSKAIA**
Global leader of Diversity and Inclusion, Korn Ferry
When it comes to dismantling structural racism within an organization, CHROs have an unmissable opportunity to effect positive change. They hugely influence an organization’s people, culture, environment and standards. They are able to support and protect a company’s values, through its workforce. Everyone looks towards the CHRO to drive the change that needs to happen.

“Gone are the days when you’re trying to get your voice into the conversation. You know there’s no way for our companies to deliver against these growth agendas if you don’t have diverse, engaged and inspired employees. And so, our people strategy sits at the center of the business strategy...which allows us to have completely different conversations—much more productive and transparent conversations—about the change that we’re looking to lead.”

Monique Matheson

Working with CEOs, CHROs have the power to tackle racist structures head-on, by transforming biased processes and practices. We’ll explore how, later on in this article. But change is never easy. CHROs need a clarity of intent and must be ready to take bold action. They must measure progress objectively, and hold people accountable, especially themselves.

“We need courageous leaders. We need people who are not only asking the questions, but questioning the answer.”

Connie Lindsey

CHROS MUST DRIVE STRUCTURAL INCLUSION
Some of our contributors likened structural racism in the workplace to playing a game where the rules are unwritten, and which change depending on the color of your skin. And when the rules are rigged against you, designed by and for the other team, it’s so much harder to win.

Organizations tend to unwittingly create processes and practices that keep things the same, aiming for consistency. And in American culture that ‘same’ is typically a heterosexual, able bodied, English-speaking white man with Western values—the default man. That’s a problem.

If you’re not the default, you’re not the obvious choice, or the first pick. You’ll be overlooked, repeatedly, in many different ways.

For organizations, that’s a huge waste of talent, because they need to leverage the full power and potential of all their people to be able to succeed through today’s complex challenges.

What happens when you turn that default on its head? Why not design around the needs of overlooked racial/ethnic minority talent instead? How would your systems differ if they were designed around the needs of black women, for example?

Structural inclusion is the best friend of underrepresentation. This emerging methodology aims to develop talent systems and processes that are free from legacy inequities and inclusive of all human differences. In the workplace, its end goal is equality for everyone: equal access, equal opportunity, equal support and equal reward.
THE **FOUR PRINCIPLES OF INCLUSIVE DESIGN**

**01 DEFINE EQUALITY.**
Inclusive design journeys begin with a deep exploration of the kind of equality your organization stands for and how that’s put in practice. Do your statements and policies match what you stand for? Be explicit with what’s expected of everyone at your organization and be clear that it’s non-negotiable.

**02 SEARCH OUT INEQUITIES.**
Are your talent systems intrinsically biased? It’s time to find out. Examine the data. Listen to the lived experience of underrepresented talent groups. Let the evidence tell the story.

**03 LEARN FROM DIVERSITY.**
Take all your users into account when you’re developing or modifying your systems. Consider the needs, wants, and aspirations of the most excluded users first, rather than designing around a lowest common denominator.

**04 DESIGN FOR ONE, BENEFIT ALL.**
If we can make something work for the exception, then we end up with a better design for all. When we specifically address the needs of overlooked users, everyone’s voice can be heard.

I WOULD CHALLENGE EVERYONE WHO REALLY WANTS TO DESIGN AN INCLUSIVE ORGANIZATION TO DESIGN TALENT PROCESSES FOR OVERLOOKED TALENT FIRST. TRY DESIGNING FOR A BLACK MOTHER. DESIGN WITH HER AND FOR HER IN A WAY THAT SHE LOVES AND SHE FEELS IS FAIR AND WILL GIVE HER A SENSE OF BELONGING.

*ALINA POLONSKAIA*
WHAT DOES CHANGE LOOK LIKE?

Ready to shake things up? First of all, you need the right leadership in place. It should go without saying that your leadership teams have to be diverse, and you need to be proactive to make that happen. Strategic hiring, for example, can help quickly build a more diverse leadership team if the internal talent pipeline isn’t ready. When Nike realized their General Manager pipeline was not as diverse as they needed they took a decision to make some strategic external hires. They brought in two black leaders who are now CEOs of two brands - Converse and Jordan. They are two of six leaders who have full profit and loss accountability in the organization and who are being prepared for C-suite jobs. Similarly, diverse slates are another tool to ensure diverse talent makes it into the room.

However, diversity is only one part of the story. Inclusivity is equally important. As Eric Hutcherson pointed out, there’s no point getting people in the door without considering what they’ll experience once they’re in-post. What systems, tools and programs can you provide to support black employees and enable them to deliver their best work? How will you ensure they stay long-term and progress in their careers?

“STRUCTURAL ISSUES NEED TO BE ADDRESSED. BUT YOU HAVE TO BREAK THEM DOWN INTO A WAY THAT YOUR ORGANIZATION CAN ACTION ON.”

MONIQUE MATHESON
CHROs must sit down and talk with leaders about what inclusive talent processes mean: what it looks like, and what needs to change in order to make it happen. They must also listen to black employees. Empower them to talk about issues and barriers they’re facing at work and be prepared to act on what they’re saying. That’s inclusiveness in action.

For Monique Matheson, inclusion means being open and transparent about policies and decisions: “You’ve got to get the decision-making set on the table, visible to all. Because when you let informality and unconscious bias run through your decisions, you end up with a system that is not equitable.” When you eliminate those unwritten rules, everyone’s clear about what’s expected of them and what they need to do to progress. You’re leveling the playing field. In the real world, this openness might look like making sure all internal openings are posted so everyone’s aware of the opportunity, instead of just a few people being given an informal heads-up.

**WHY DATA MATTERS**

Structural racism is so universal and pervasive it can be hard to pinpoint where bias is creeping in. That’s where the power of data comes in to play: the numbers tell the real story. It’s imperative to examine and analyze the data and objectively assess how diverse and inclusive your organization really is.

Connie Lindsey shared a great story about the importance of data:

“Our hypothesis was that movement was one of the key determinants of progression and promotion in our firm. So we looked at over 4000 lateral moves in our corporation, over about four years. What we discovered from the data was that of those 4000 moves over 90% went to white people, particularly white males.

We had to look at what the root causes were. And we found that these were manager-initiated moves. For example, someone I work for knows me, we have similar values and we do similar things together. When an opportunity comes open he taps me on the shoulder and says, ‘Hey Connie, I think this would be great for you,’ whether I’m eminently qualified or not. This happens time and time again. And black people and people of color are not part of that discourse.

So we took that data, looked at it by business unit, then went back to those business leaders and said, ‘Here is what the experience is within your group, here is the outcome, and here is how it impacts engagement and access to talent. You’re leaving people out.’ And then we held those leaders accountable for ways to do it differently.

I can make an assertion about a behavior or a practice that I think is structurally or systemically racist or unfair, but I’m also going to bring you the data. That really bears that out in terms of practice and then collectively saying, ‘Here is what we need to do to reform and transform those systems going forward.’

IN MY SHOES

HEAR ME  STAND BY ME  IN MY SHOES  DON’T TALK, DO  SUSTAIN CHANGE
SIX HEADWINDS FACED BY BLACK EXECUTIVES

Everyone faces headwinds, but black professionals also have to contend with unconscious bias and unfair treatment that create undue barriers to career progression.

1. **Microaggressions**
   Subtle or unintentional behavior that shows prejudice or bias.

2. **Glass-cliff projects**
   High-risk tasks disproportionately assigned to ethnically diverse talent and women.

3. **Judged on performance, not potential**
   Required to prove their value repeatedly through overperforming, despite demonstrated success.

4. **Unjust assumptions**
   Being overlooked due to negative preconceptions based on racial identity.

5. **Expected to do more than most**
   Exceptional performance treated as the norm, in a way not expected of their peers.

6. **Social exclusion**
   Being excluded from social circles in and outside of the workplace.

Solving a problem as entrenched as systemic racism needs leadership. It needs employees. It needs allies. It needs everyone working at the same table to solve the problem. It also requires a readiness to dismantle and redesign talent systems more inclusively. This is an area on which we must make progress.

If organizations focus on talent and culture as much as they do on business, working with the same level of commitment and rigor, they will succeed. And everyone will benefit.
Creating a racially equitable future as inclusive leaders

Organizations need their CEOs and boards to be champions of racial equity. But to lead their businesses to become truly inclusive and equitable by also addressing systemic racism, they also need to be highly skilled in a multitude of ways.

We gathered a panel of dynamic business leaders to discuss what inclusive leadership looks like in action. This article is based on that discussion.

Joining us were:

CHARLIE LOWREY
CEO of Prudential Financial

SUSAN STORY
Lead Independent Director at Raymond James as well as a Board Director at Dominion Energy and the retired CEO of American water

TRISTAN WALKER
The founder and CEO of Walker and Company brand (a wholly owned subsidiary of the Proctor & Gamble) and also on the board of Foot Locker

GARY BURNISON
CEO of Korn Ferry

AYANA PARSONS
Senior Partner at Korn Ferry
CEOs MUST STEP UP TO THE CHALLENGE

Now is when CEOs can step out in front, lead the way, and bring about lasting change. There are 3000 public company CEOs in the United States of America, and they have the power to change the way Blacks are treated in their organizations.

Today’s CEOs can’t afford to ignore, outsource or delegate an issue this fundamental. They must take ownership in order to dismantle the systemic racism in their organizations and in the communities they serve.

For that to happen, we need honest and real dialogue about racism and the raw experience of being Black in corporate America and in society. We need empathy. We need authentic leadership that’s willing to hold itself accountable and is ready to learn and change. As Charlie Lowrey told us, corporate America is currently having the kinds of conversations that have never happened before.

THIS IS A TIME WHEN LEADERS HAVE TO LEAD. THIS ISN’T ABOUT SERVANT LEADERSHIP RIGHT NOW. PEOPLE LOOK TO YOU, THEY LOOK TO YOU FOR MESSAGING, THEY LOOK TO YOU FOR ACTION, BUT THIS IS A TIME WHEN THEY ALSO LOOK TO YOU TO BE AUTHENTIC AND FRANKLY, EMPATHETIC AND FINALLY TO HOLD YOURSELF AND THE COMPANY ACCOUNTABLE.

CHARLIE LOWREY
Of course, it will take courage. Leaders must get comfortable with having uncomfortable conversations around race. Tristan Walker raised the importance of “acknowledging the trauma” of being part of a community that has been victimized for over 400 years. How can you support your consumers in ways that aren’t only dollar focused, but action oriented?

As Susan Story puts it,

“It’s not enough for a company to say, ‘I’m going to be charitable and give to my community.’ As companies we have to own the social health of the communities we serve... not just giving money, but being personally involved in education, in health and in human services. Being personally involved in economic development and economic opportunity, especially in under-served communities.”

As we’ll see, that’s the right thing to do from a societal perspective, and the smart thing to do from a business perspective.
WHAT DO YOU STAND FOR?

It’s time to act. Words alone won’t get the job done. Organizations have to pick a side, and the right choice is obvious. Justice or injustice? Fairness or inequality? It’s no longer enough to say you’re not racist, you must be actively anti-racist. Speak up publicly and make a statement about what you stand for.

This means your corporate values matter more now than ever. In fact, they should be guiding your every action. But are they really? As Tristan Walker said,

“You’d be surprised by how many CEOs (let alone their employees) don’t know what their company’s values are, and certainly don’t know what their own personal values are. And if they don’t know that, how are they leading?”

Your values are manifested in the way that you actually do your day to day. They mean employees and potential employees already know how you do business, and understand what’s expected of them. Everything you stand for is on the table, and it’s your job to stay authentic, stay consistent, and stay accountable.
We asked our panelists about the practical steps they’re taking to eradicate systemic racism in their own organizations and in the wider world.

American Water introduced annual employee goal plans which gave equal weighting to results and how people achieved those results by demonstrating their values of safety and trust. There was no point in blowing out financial and operational goals at the expense of trust and safety, because it impacted bonuses and performance reviews.

Tristan Walker uses his corporate values – courage, inspiration, respect, judgment – as criteria at interview and during annual reviews. Those values are not specific to race, or gender or any other signifier, they can apply to everyone, and everyone should be able to adhere to them.
Inequality in compensation is a relatively straightforward fix that should be at the top of a CEO’s list of priorities. Get an outside assessment of any pay disparities in your business, and correct them immediately, no questions asked. To take it a step further, look at pay fairness across your company. Is a group being paid unfairly relative to their importance to your business – even if you’re already paying at market rate? After a comprehensive analysis to ensure pay across the company was equitable across demographics and any outliers adjusted, American Water looked more deeply at their customer care representatives job classification, which has a high representation of black women. Although these employees were being paid fairly, both at a market rate and consistent with others in the same classification, it ‘felt right’ that these invaluable employees, who were the first point of contact for customers, should all be paid no less than a minimum amount which was adjusted upward.

Meanwhile, Prudential is working top-down. The firm’s leaders write an annual commitment letter to the CEO with specific goals around diversity and inclusion. Their performance review (and long-term compensation) is directly tied to how they do, and how committed they are to achieving those goals. At the same time, Prudential’s board is 80% diverse, which is something they have developed consciously; a diverse board means better discussion and better business overall.

Our panel also discussed the recent power move by Reddit founder Alexis Ohanian, a white male, who recently resigned from Reddit’s board so he could be replaced by a Black director, Michael Seibel.

A BOLD STATEMENT

INDEED.
In the light of the Minneapolis City Council unanimously voting to disband their broken police system, we asked our panelists what needs to go today. In business, what needs to be dismantled, reimagined, and started again from scratch?

Our panelists agreed that CEOs and board members must first rethink the idea that eliminating racism is purely altruistic or moral. It’s also a smart business move. As Tristan Walker puts it: “Let’s follow the money.” The majority of people on earth are people of color, and the US itself will be minority White by 2040. This shift is inevitable, and your business strategy needs to adapt now.

As Walker says,

“You have to plan for the future, and as a leader it’s your fiduciary duty to maximize shareholder value by taking diversity seriously.”

Many businesses are committing to getting proportional representation in place, having 15% Black employees, or 15% of products on their shelves from Black-owned brands. Why stop at 15% though? Why not 50%? That’s the radical, forward-thinking move here.
“Being involved in education initiatives in underserved communities is not just about helping young people who may not have an equal chance, or being altruistic or charitable. If you don’t invest time, resources, and money now, you will not have the people you need to work for your company in the future. This is a fundamental investment in your company’s future.”

Susan Story

Can we eliminate bias in the hiring process? Do we need hiring managers at all? That’s the question they’re asking at Prudential, where they’re looking at all the barriers in the traditional HR system and breaking them down. Is there a way to help people advance in a more equitable way, based on the skills they actually have? And this isn’t just a job for CHROs; CEOs must take the lead.

Structural inclusion offers a way forward. That means being purposeful and strategic around hiring, developing, promoting, and sponsoring black leaders. Black talent abounds in every organization, but it’s still being overlooked. There are not enough Blacks at the top levels, and that needs to change, fast. So how can we fast-track their progress? Black talent must be given the opportunities, experience, development, coaching, and support that sets them up for success. How else will we achieve a more equitable future?

The business leaders of today now have an incredible opportunity to change things for millions of Americans. To be truly inclusive, CEOs and board members must put their considerable powers into play to make sure everyone’s invited into the room and then enabled to deliver their best. It’s a time for action and disruption, decisiveness, and commitment.

Redrawing corporate America feels radical, but in fact it’s just a smart business decision. Societal change is inevitable; will your company be ahead of the curve, or behind it?

MONEY AND POWER CAN LIBERATE ONLY IF THEY ARE USED TO DO SO. THEY CAN IMPRISON AND INHIBIT MORE FINALLY THAN BARRED WINDOWS AND IRON CHAINS.

MAYA ANGELOU
Organizations that are serious about eradicating racism and achieving equality will need to look at transforming the organization as a whole by taking action in the five areas listed below. Those that do will not only open the corporate world to black talent but will build inclusive workplaces for all.

**UNDERSTAND THE ROOT CAUSES**
Examine the data and listen to your black employees.

**BUILD INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP**
Recruit and develop inclusive leaders at every level of the organization.

**ARCHITECT STRUCTURAL INCLUSION**
Build equitable and transparent structures, processes, and practices through inclusive design.

**SHAPE BEHAVIORAL INCLUSION**
Help your people build inclusive mindsets, skillsets, and relationships.

**DRIVE AND SUSTAIN CHANGE**
Put in place plans and tools to help you make change happen fast, keep people engaged, and track progress.

Click here to visit our Race Matters hub to learn more.
FOR MORE INFORMATION
PLEASE CONTACT:

clientsupport@kornferry.com
+1 800-633-4410
+1 310-226-6352