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DISRUPTING RACISM IN THE WORKPLACE

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American companies have a diversity problem.

In 2019 Glassdoor, one of the world's largest job and recruiting sites in the world, released a [Diversity and Inclusion Study](#) which surveyed over 1,100 U.S. employees. The study revealed that 42% of employees have experienced or seen racism at work and that 55% workers say their company should do more to increase diversity and inclusion.

While the workplace is more multi-racial, working African Americans still face many obstacles. They are less likely than their white peers to be [hired, developed, and promoted](#). Of course, other minorities and women face discrimination too, but at this moment in time, this article focuses on Black racism, as this group has a long history of oppression and anything that happens to improve their work life matters to other marginalized groups as well.

Anti-black racism is a critical issue in the hiring process with white applicants receiving 36% more callbacks for jobs than equally qualifying Black Americans. ([Study](#) by researchers at Northwestern University, Harvard, and the Institute for Social Research in Norway).

Besides facing discrimination in their job searches, Black Americans endure lower

wages, fewer promotional opportunities, less benefits, increased risks of being fired and higher levels of unemployment than their white counterparts. ([Center for American Progress 2020](#)).

42% OF EMPLOYEES HAVE EXPERIENCED OR SEEN RACISM AT WORK

Black women are more likely to work than white women: almost 85% percent of Black mothers are breadwinners, which represents a larger share than any other racial group, which of course has its own issues with childcare, etc.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reveals weekly earnings for Black full-time employees was still 30% less than white workers in [2022](#). Black workers also receive fewer benefits: only a little more than half had private health insurance in as per the [2018](#) U.S. Census, compared with 75% percent of whites. They also face greater job instability as Black workers often work in less stable industries such as retail



services and health care sectors including home health aides and nursing home workers. (Center for American Progress 2019).

Today, Black people account for about 13% of the U.S. population, but they occupy just over 3% of the senior leadership roles at large companies and less than 1% of all Fortune 500 CEO positions, according to

the analysis by the Center for Talent Innovation.

Yet many studies have shown that diverse teams are more innovative, more thoughtful, more objective and actually perform better. Let's look at some concrete action steps to disrupt racism and balance the workforce.

How to Bring Change for Business Prosperity

The first step is for business leaders to take a serious, truthful assessment of where they're at with diversity, and be upfront about where they've fallen short. This transparency builds trust with employees and gives hope for change. As part of the assessment, it's critical to root out any racist policies, practices and incidents. Shift from focusing on the business case for diversity to the moral case. Make it a moral campaign to do the right thing and communicate that to employees. It's also important that the person leading equity efforts report directly to the CEO so that they have access and funding.

Once the assessment is complete, employers can create a comprehensive framework with specific measurable goals. For example, Increase C-level suite Black managers by 10% through mentorship and

sponsorship programs. (We've learned Black employees benefit from [sponsorship](#) in moving up the corporate ladder).

Many feel this is the time to take a bold stance. Ideally make a commitment to be an anti-racist company and look at all issues from an institutional basis.

"To be anti-racist is to acknowledge the permanence of racism through organizations, industries and communities, and to recognize that racism is a system of disproportionate opportunity and penalties based on skin color," says Laura Morgan Roberts, a University of Virginia professor, author and speaker. She is co-editor of a great resource: the book [Race, Work and Leadership: New Perspectives on the Black Experience](#) (Harvard Business Press, 2019).



Since many employees worry about retaliation as we learned from the #metoo movement, it's a good time to revamp your complaint system and make it easy to root out racism. Some suggest you tie

complaints to a neutral party, or your EAP programs which are easily accessible. Develop a diversity framework by looking at your systems with a fresh perspective.

Expand Recruitment Channels

Recruiting and hiring is often the first area companies look to improve diversity. The number of African Americans earning degrees is increasing, so recruiting needs to be first line and strategic. Companies should create a diversity hiring strategy specifically for Black employees which would include recruiting at more HBCU's (Historically Black Colleges & Universities). There are over 100 HBCU's in America and employers shouldn't limit themselves to just Howard and the top ones. Other ideas include creating educational partnerships with HBCU's. Recruiters should also familiarize themselves with school career centers, get creative to grab graduate's attention with events, etc. Entice prospects with stronger benefit packages, including health care and retirement savings.

Companies can develop more fair and inclusive hiring practices such as Open Hiring which doesn't look at history and "blind recruitment" which removes bias from resumes. Use software rather than human judgement to screen applicants, rewrite job descriptions and rethink criteria for performance evaluations.

Consider using a Racial Equity Tool. [Explore Racial Equity Tools](#) — a website designed to support individuals and groups working to achieve racial equity.

**WEEKLY EARNINGS
FOR BLACK FULL-
TIME EMPLOYEES
WAS STILL 30%
LESS THAN WHITE
WORKERS IN 2022**



Integrate Sponsorship

One reason Black professionals are struggling to scale the corporate ladder is a lack of face time with senior leaders, reveals a [corporate study](#). Merck CEO, Kenneth Frazier, is one of Fortune 500's few black CEO's. On [CNBC's Squawk Box](#) he talked openly about these inequalities. "I know for sure that what put my life on a different trajectory was that someone intervened to give me an opportunity, to close that opportunity gap," he said. "And that opportunity gap is still there."

Sponsorship and mentorship are both important in promoting Black employees, but sponsors are in leadership positions and go beyond answering questions and giving advice. Their main purpose is to promote the sponsored worker. Sponsors act as advocates and use their leadership skills, power and influence to advance the career of their "sponsee". They are invested in the worker and recommend their sponsee for coveted assignments, pay increases and promotions. When a Black employee is sponsored, it gives them more of a voice in the company including through access to their sponsor's network.

Workplaces can set up a Sponsorship Committee to recruit sponsors and Black employees with potential. The sponsors must be senior leaders with a desire to champion a potential protégé using their reputation and power for advancement. In turn, Black employees who succeed and advance in a corporation, can later become a sponsor themselves to feed Black workers into the senior level job pipeline.

Having senior sponsors within an organization can help avoid the segregation that leaves Black workers underrepresented in high ranking positions.

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Modernize Work Conditions

Review work conditions at your company. Take learnings from the COVID-19 pandemic and the fact Black Americans died at [three times](#) the rate of white Americans, it's important to think about hazard pay for essential workers, paid sick leave and grief days/counseling for those that have lost family members. Is your company a good place for Black employees to work? Do you care about their special circumstances?

Knowing many female Black workers are breadwinners, what provisions do you allow for childcare and caretaking of family members? Set policies that look after specific needs.

Advocate for employees to vote and fulfill jury duties.

Practice Listening and Social Connection

One way to get a pulse of your diverse employees is to prioritize meetings and social connections. These can be as simple as introducing employee resource groups, start a speaker series showcasing real experiences and start an Allyship group.

Allyship is where white and non-Black managers lead conversations on how they can be a better ally and shows how people of all races can support marginalized groups who experience injustice. Dr. Robin DiAngelo who wrote [“White Fragility: Why It’s So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism”](#), says white leaders have to

understand how racism works, “the decisions made at those tables affect the lives of those not at the tables and if I am not aware of the barriers you face, then I won’t see them, much less be motivated to remove them.”

Other ideas might include creating book, article or movie clubs that meet monthly to discuss and share. Send staff to national or regional training conferences to immerse staff in a community of people working together to advance racial equity.



Bring Awareness Through Learning

Studies show that education about the Black experience increases [awareness of bias](#) and support for anti-racist policies.

White employees and others can take individual responsibility for their own education by tapping into the wealth of resources compiled out there.

Unconscious bias training is another topic to incorporate to an organization's standard

diversity education program, which can equip people with skills for reducing the role of bias in their everyday decisions and interactions at work.

One company started with making everyone read [How to Be an Antiracist](#) by Ibram X. Kendi. Companies are getting creative.

It's Time to Get Creative

Find ways to support Black-owned businesses. Have your social media follow more Black-owned businesses. Donate services, goods and funds. Big businesses are getting creative too; [Netflix](#) will move \$100 million in cash to financial institutions that serve Black communities, [Uber Eats](#) is waiving fees from Black-owned restaurants, [Activision](#) is investing in systems to identify and ban racist language on their online gaming, [Glossier](#) is donating grants to Black-owned beauty brands and [Ben & Jerry's](#) has strongly condemned White Supremacy and donates to Black Lives Matter.

racial injustice. [Apple](#) and [Walmart](#) are committing \$100 million each to create new Racial Equity Initiatives. Artists are donating proceeds and companies are finding new ways to contribute every day. What will your company do?

Companies can root out racism within their walls by making racial diversity a moral value, by being honest about where they're at to build trust, promoting real conversations about race and strategizing new diversity plans.

Google, Facebook, Amazon, Target and Nike are committing tens of millions to fight



The big idea is that once companies truly understand the reality of the Black work experience, they will champion actions that balance the playing field. And although it's tough, uncomfortable work — it's worth the effort — not only for Black Americans but also for the many other underrepresented or marginalized groups in our society.

About Vubiz

Since 2002, Vubiz has built a stellar reputation as an outstanding content provider with an award-winning elearning catalog in topics like harassment prevention, diversity, compliance, health & safety, business skills training, banking, and more. Vubiz provides content for the Canadian Center for Occupational Health & Safety and many Fortune 500 companies.

Vubiz offers a full corporate training solution with a large off-the-shelf course library that can be branded and customized, an LMS application, and custom content development capabilities. It's Diversity & Inclusion training program includes Diversity in the Workplace, Unconscious Bias, Gender Identity, and a free [Let's Talk About Racism](#) course.

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