



A GUIDE FOR LEADERS TO COURAGEOUSLY LEAD CONVERSATIONS ON RACE

Conversations around racial equity and justice have become front and center in the wake of the most recent murders of unarmed black Americans and employees are increasingly looking to their leaders to create a safe space for conversation. Silence can be deafening. This guide presents some considerations and best practices to guide leaders to have these conversations with the courage, curiosity and compassion that can lead to real change.

What Leaders Should Do

- **Create a safe space for conversation.** Create a safe space, but do not mandate conversation. Employees may be facing diversity fatigue or many not prefer a group conversation. Do what best serves your team.
- **Approach the conversation with humility.** State from the start that you may not get everything right. This will help build trust and give employees the permission to engage in the conversation with authenticity and vulnerability.
- **Set ground rules.** Approach the conversation with respect and ensure employees know that racist or offensive comments will not be tolerated.
- **Listen, truly listen.** Don't rush the conversation. Allow participants to express their perspectives and reactions to all that is going. Allow for differing perspectives, but be prepared to steer the conversation in a positive direction if need be.
- **Stay vulnerable** Be prepared to hear perspectives that are different from your own or that illicit strong emotion. Be open to sharing your own perspectives.

What Leaders Should NOT Do

- **Rely on employees of color to lead these conversations.** Doing so increases the emotional tax that employees of color (and particularly African American employees) experience during racial incidents.
- **Discourage people from engaging.** You are providing a safe space for conversation to happen and allowing a forum for differing perspectives. Unless employees are not respectful in the dialogue, no one should be discouraged from taking part.
- **Allow one or a few employees to dominate the conversation.** Ensure that employees who show up are given the opportunity to share their perspectives and the conversation is not dominated by a few vocal employees.



How to Prepare for the Conversation

In order to be an ally and thoughtfully engage in discussions about race, it's crucial you do work to understand the privilege that shapes your perspective and educate yourself on the things you need to personally learn and unlearn in order to be a better advocate. See a list of [anti-racist education resources](#).

Other Considerations

- **Consider limiting the number of attendees.** The vulnerability and engagement that is required to have meaningful conversations on race works best in a smaller, more intimate group. Consider limiting each of the conversations to no more than 10-15 employees to allow for meaningful dialogue.
- **This is a dialogue, not a debate.** Leaders who provide a safe space for dialogue must ensure that a debate does not ensue. If the conversation goes down this road (i.e. "Black Lives Matter" vs. "All Lives Matter"), remind employees that this is a dialogue and steer the conversation back to gaining an understanding of differing perspectives.
- **The conversation is the catalyst.** Reflect on the conversation and make an effort to incorporate the perspectives of others into your mindset and actions. It's hard to change your thinking and habits regarding race, but you can start by identifying your implicit racial biases and commit yourself to change.

Questions to Consider

- What are your reactions to recent events? How have they affected you?
- What are your thoughts on race, racism and inclusion in our world?
- What are our opportunities to advance a more inclusive workplace?
- What are our blindspots? What are my blindspots as a leader?
- What can our company do to address racism in the workplace? In the community?
- What actions can each of us commit to in order to advance a more inclusive world?

FIND MORE RESOURCES BELOW:

<https://resources.kanarys.com/>