



SHEREEN DANIELS

OPENING UP EXECUTIVE BOARD CONVERSATIONS ABOUT RACE



THE
ANTI-RACIST
ORGANIZATION:
DISMANTLING
SYSTEMIC
RACISM IN THE
WORKPLACE



SHEREEN DANIELS

Having conversations about racism is typically not usual custom and practice for many organizations. We have not been taught how to hold space for challenging and emotive subjects, particularly when we hold strong personal views or we feel a deep discomfort.

I mention frequently throughout the book that we cannot fix what we don't understand and we cannot solve what we refuse to talk about was born out of recognising how my silence made me complicit.

As with all the content and resources I provide, they are authentic, real and challenging. I hope to inspire you and your colleagues to do the real in-depth work that is needed to dismantle systemic racism because you recognise that sustainable business is built upon foundations of equity, anti-racism and kindness.

If it's any consolation, this is one of the most difficult topics you will ever have to address in the workplace, so if you can get to grips with this, you are off to a great start.

When helping people learn new behaviors, the focus needs to be on creating cultural conditions to make it easier for leaders and colleagues to ask the right questions and therefore do the right thing.

All you need to do this work intentionally, without perpetuating harm is to keep an open mind and continually push past your discomfort.

SHEREEN DANIELS

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SETTING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR SAFE SPACES FOR BRAVE CONVERSATIONS

These questions are examples to help prompt for further reflection, growth and to help you make informed decisions about what to do next.

When doing these exercises remember:

- Establish 'ground rules' for the conversation. Remind people you are creating a space for brave conversations. That there are no right or wrong answers and everyone's voice deserves to be heard.
- The ethnic makeup of your group will impact on the breadth and depth of conversation. As will other identities such as gender, class, country of origin, religion and so on. Consider the adaptations you would need to make to ensure everyone contributes.
- Think about your reaction to the questions posed and how your peers react. If you see their words don't quite match their body language, probe a little more. Ask them to expand on their response or a simple 'tell me more' can do wonders.
- Whilst this may go against your principles and values, if your peer says something overtly racist and discriminatory, resist the urge to shut down the conversation. Remember the aim of doing this exercise is to understand where people are. You can use this information to help you decide what best course of action to take going forward.
- Where possible, adapt the learnings to something concrete that is tied to your organization. This anchors the conversation in specific rather than abstract hypothetical scenarios.
- This is not an exercise to put Black colleagues under the microscope, center whiteness or ease any discomfort about the subject. Remember this is the start of many conversations, this exercise is akin to opening the first door.

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A REFLECTION ON WHERE YOU ARE NOW (AS INDIVIDUALS)

These are example questions that open up meaningful reflection. Pose them in a way that encourages 'I' answers, not 'we' and give your peers 5-10 mins to reflect on all the questions.

- 1** What are your personal views about systemic racism? How much do you know?
- 2** What role do you believe your organization should play in tackling systemic racism?
- 3** What worries you about doing more to become an anti-racist organization? Conversely, what worries you if we stay on the same trajectory?
- 4** What support do you need to take a more active role in dismantling systemic racism?

POWER QUESTIONS:

WHY DOES OUR ENVIRONMENT WORK SO WELL FOR PEOPLE WHO LOOK LIKE US? [THE MAJORITY]?

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THAT?

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A REFLECTION ON WHERE YOU ARE NOW (AS AN ORGANIZATION)

- 1** Thinking about your key stakeholders - what do you feel are their expectations of what you should or shouldn't be doing in this space?
- 2** Putting to one side your focus on hiring more 'diverse' candidates, what other action have you taken to date that specifically addresses systemic racism?
- 3** If you had to give marks out of ten for your organizational performance in dismantling systemic racism, what score would you give and why?
- 4** What does your version of 'great' look like? What will it take to get there?
- 5** How far do you have the resources, capability and skill set to deliver on your vision? What are you prepared to do about that?

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