

Race *in the* Workplace

*Zoom in partnership with TIME for Learning invited **Shaun Harper**, one of the world's leading racial equity experts, to join Zoom's Chief Diversity Officer **Damien Hooper-Campbell** for a multi-part series focused on practical approaches to improving and advancing racial equity, diversity, and inclusion in organizations.*

For many leaders, tackling race in the workplace is challenging, and so they have historically chosen avoidance as their primary strategy. Many executives have little to no personal and professional experience talking about racism, and are afraid of being naïve, making mistakes that make them seem insensitive, or worse, racist.

But since the recent murders of many Black people, including George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, avoidance is no longer an option. The issues of police brutality in Black communities, structural and systemic racism, anti-Blackness, and white supremacy, as well as inaction on long-standing racial problems have come to the fore, and corporations have felt compelled to make internal and external statements stating that they are anti-racist and that Black lives matter.

However, these statements have to be more than just words in a moment of crisis. This can't be a moment, it must be a movement that leads to long-term, demonstrable progress on racial equity goals, and increased value on the lives and professional contributions of people of color in the workplace.

This document will summarize the key takeaways from each episode. To watch or learn more about the other episodes in the series, please visit time.com/raceintheworkplace.

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Essential Takeaways: Episode 2

How to Talk About Racism at Work

Now more than ever, talking about race, both within and outside of the workplace, is so important. The United States and the larger world are finally having a global conversation about structural and systemic racism as well as interpersonal racism. This session explored proven and practical ways to stimulate productive conversations about race.

Ways that Race is Typically Handled (or Mishandled) in the Workplace

- Avoid confronting someone directly who does or says something racist or is racially out of bounds, talking instead about the incident to another colleague or a small group of colleagues.
- Tackling a racial crisis only in the aftermath instead of working on these issues in a preventative, proactive way.
- Not stimulating important conversations about external racial tragedies at work.
- Leaving conversations about racism to be led by employees of color.
- Not addressing race at all or skillfully talking around race and racial issues rather than addressing them head on.

8 Strategies to Make Race Conversations Productive in the Workplace

- 1. Facilitate opportunities for your colleagues to engage their personal racial histories.**
 - Ask every employee to write a 1-2 page personal racial history using the following prompts, and have colleagues share discoveries and reflections in pairs for 15-20 minutes and then subsequently discuss in the larger group.
 - How was race treated and talked about in your family?
 - How diverse was your neighborhood and school?
 - What did you learn about race in school (K-College)?
 - What did you learn about Black men from watching the news? What do you continue to learn?
 - When and how did you unlearn racism?
- 2. Invite a conversation about seemingly taboo questions about race.**
 - Distribute blank note cards to all of the employees in the room with three instructions:
 - Write legibly.
 - Don't write your name anywhere on the note card.
 - Ask every employee to write a question that they've long had about something pertaining to race in your workplace or about a racial dynamic within your company, not in the outside world.
 - Give everyone 2-3 minutes to complete their note card.
 - Collect the cards and shuffle them.

- Ask for 5-7 volunteers from the audience to come up, pull a card, and read the question that is on their note card.
 - Start an open discussion about the questions read aloud.
- 3. Invite examples of encounters with racism within the workplace.**
- Distribute blank note cards to all of the employees in the room with three instructions:
 - Write legibly.
 - Don't write your name anywhere on the note card.
 - Ask employees to succinctly describe a time that they have experienced racism either:
 - Firsthand here in the workplace
 - You observed someone saying something racist or treating another employee in a racially biased way
 - Ask for 5-7 volunteers from the audience to come up, pull a card, and read the situation that is on their note card.
 - Lead them in a conversation about the situation described on the note card.
 - Ask what exactly is wrong in the situation to make sure that everyone is on the same page and understands.
 - Engage them in a conversation about how such a thing could have occurred in your company.
 - Ask how this situation could have been better handled.
 - And most importantly, ask how to ensure that this particular thing doesn't happen ever again in this workplace environment.
- 4. Facilitate reflections on firsthand encounters with racism outside of work.**
- Start the session by first making sure that everyone understands what this current movement is about and inviting reflections from fellow colleagues about their firsthand experiences with police officers and law enforcement officers, racial microaggressions, and stereotyping.
 - Tell a story to kick it off, and then ask for additional stories.
- 5. Ascertain a range of perspectives on a seemingly polarizing or controversial racial issue.**
- Use polls to get anonymous data on race in your workplace. Try using: "Our company has serious racial problems" with poll options: strongly disagree, disagree somewhat, I don't know, agree somewhat, strongly agree.
 - Display the results.
 - Host a conversation about the range of answers, starting with asking for volunteers who responded "I don't know" to explain why they chose that answer.
 - Move to "disagree" at any level and ask them why they disagree.
 - Lastly, ask those who "agreed" at any level to share concrete examples.
- 6. Use current events and industry sagas that have made either local, national, or international news to stimulate conversations.**
- Ask employees if they think it could ever happen at your company.
 - Ask what proactive, strategic, and preventative actions you can take as an organization to ensure that it never will.
- 7. Use seemingly fictitious vignettes to stimulate conversations.**
- Develop a situation or situations.
 - For example: A company's Native American, Asian American, Pacific Islander, Latinx, and multiracial employees feel alienated because all conversations about race and diversity default to a Black-white binary in the company.
 - Ask the team the following questions:
 - How can we address this with deep intentionality without calling attention away from anti-Black racism and the experiences of our Black colleagues?
 - How might we also be deliberately inclusive of other employees of color who may also be having racialized experiences?

- How can we proactively address this here?
- What shouldn't we do to solve a problem like this?

8. Formally assess the workplace racial climate.

- Use survey instruments, focus groups, and individual interviews to do a formal systematic analysis of the workplace's racial climate.
- Use those findings to inform and sustain subsequent conversations about race in the workplace.
- Track company progress in dealing with that particular racial issue that the data revealed.
- As any CEO or business strategist will attest, clear communication is vital to the success of your business.

And today it is more important than ever. With the Black Lives Matter movement, it is high time organizations address racism in the workplace. Of course, doing so is not always easy, but by putting in the effort—the work—you help do your part to change systemic racism in the workplace.

By addressing topics like these—understanding employees' experience with racism, how to talk to employees about racism, and how to recruit and hire professionals of color—we are moving the conversation forward.

Let's not stop now. Check out more info and takeaways from additional episodes of the Race in the Workplace series, in partnership with Zoom and TIME for Learning at time.com/raceintheworkplace.