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 6
Supporting and Partnering with Employee Networks / Resource Groups

What is an employee network or employee resource group? Groups of employees that have formed either on their own or through their organization's direction that focus on the opportunities and challenges of raising awareness for various communities—from gender and sexual orientation to race and ethnicity, and more. These groups raise awareness and effect change for equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). In many cases, they are the lifeline of EDI within organizations.

Learn how to support and honor Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) as well as how to partner with them to advance EDI goals within your organization.

The Challenges that Employee Resource Groups Face

- **They form haphazardly**. Most times, there is not a directive to launch, support, and develop ERGs within companies. The groups are usually by employees for employees and they don't tend to be integrated into the larger strategy for the company.
- **They emerge with no resources.** Companies have not set aside a budget for these groups and often fail to incorporate them into their budgets over time. Or, if they are included in a budget, ERGs usually get limited funding to develop their programs. In the cases where there is a Chief Diversity Officer, many companies allot the entire EDI budget to funding that single position, with no additional dollars for ERGs and their initiatives.
- **They are expected to provide professional learning with no resources.** ERGs are encouraged to develop programs to move the company's EDI goals forward but are not given support to do so. The ERGs then have to ask outside guest speakers and/or consultants to speak at their events for free. All the while ERGs exist within large, global companies that have the money—these companies just haven't allocated it appropriately or thoughtfully.
- **Leaders don't actually know what happens in ERGs**. ERGs provide so much value to the EDI infrastructure of a company, but senior executives often don't recognize the depth of value they actually add.
- **ERG leaders are often viewed as free labor.** As volunteers, ERG leaders work hard to advance EDI goals, but rarely receive the recognition or compensation they deserve. In fact, most times their role and impact as an ERG leader is not even considered in their annual review. They often don't get credit or acknowledgment outside of their scope of work.
- **There is an inequitable distribution in the funding of ERGs.** ERGs focused on LGBTQ+ and women's communities commonly receive more money and support than do ERGs for employees of color. This should be equal. It is also important to note that even though women of color are usually members of the ERG focused on women, activities tend to default to white women's cultural interests.

- **They are not included in the creation of EDI agendas** within the company. When developing and implementing EDI goals for the company, executives often fail to use ERGs as a source for intel and collaboration—often hiring outside consultant firms to help determine EDI strategies.

Underfunding continues for ERGs. Many corporations made grand gestures as the Black Lives Matter movement began. Lots of companies made impressive monetary donations to Black Lives Matter, Black organizations, and Black communities. While this was generous, some are not nearly as generous in funding their own ERGs. In many cases, they cared more about their external-facing commitment than actually supporting their own employees of color in the workplace.

6 Ways to More Effectively Partner with ERGs

1. **Partner with them as sources for pipeline diversity.** You know there is a need to diversify mid-level to upper-level management, but companies tend to look externally for talent and don't think to pull from their internal ERGs. Why? Because the performance of ERG leaders is not reflected in their reviews.
2. **Invite them to offer insights into the racial climate of the organization**. ERGs can be a source of credible intel as to the racial vulnerabilities and racial missteps of the company.
3. **Have them offer feedback on your EDI plans**. Many companies pay thousands of dollars to outside consultants for feedback on how to foster and sustain an equitable, diverse, and inclusive environment. However, your company's ERGs can help to enhance and ensure the credibility of your EDI plan.
4. **Turn to ERG leaders for advice.** They can be very helpful in providing context on what to say and not to say—and how to message commitments to EDI.
5. **See ERG leaders as recruiting champions.** They know the ins and outs of the company so they can speak to the effectiveness of the EDI plan in your company as it pertains to attracting and hiring a more diverse candidate pool.
6. **Ask for access to their networks.** Many professionals of color have memberships in networks and communities outside of your company that support people of color. This can be helpful in not only recruiting employees of color but also in bringing in experts to talk to EDI goals. Be sure to compensate them as you would an external recruiter who helped you source talent.

10 Ways to Better Support ERGs

1. **Increase the level of financial support for Chief Diversity Officers**. CDOs should not possess the only budget committed to achieving EDI goals. They need additional funding and support from across the business to do their job effectively.
2. **Better resource the ERGs themselves.** Write monetary support and incentives into the organization's annual budget.
3. **Compensate ERG leaders for their unpaid labor.** Give them bonuses and stipends for their volunteerism that's outside of their work scope.
4. **Pay ERG members for access to their networks.** You would pay a headhunter, wouldn't you? It's the same idea.
5. **Invest in the reparation of historical harm.** It's not enough to give ERGs money for programming. You must also give money to help repair years of neglect around EDI topics.
6. **Give ERG members access to C-suite executives.** It's important to give both members and leaders facetime with upper management. You can't presume that the ERG members' bosses will relay their

thoughts and ideas accurately to executives. Executive sponsors at the C-suite level are key. Be intentional about pairing executive sponsors with ERG communities that are different than the ones the leader might normally self-identify with. This will drive increased learning and partnership.

7. **Value the work ERGs do.** Acknowledge and reward their work in their performance appraisals.

8. **Strategically promote ERG leaders.** See these groups as places to source promotable talent. These groups benefit the company's goals and the people who lead them should be invested in from a professional development standpoint.

9. **Celebrate their work internally *and* externally.** Executives and leaders throughout the company should routinely espouse the value these team members are adding to the company.

10. **Hold leaders and managers accountable for partnering with ERGs**. Ask for concrete, qualitative examples of how they are supporting ERGs (not just with funding, but also by showing up and sponsoring).

5 Ways to Incentivize Commitment to EDI Goals

1. Award deserving bonuses.
2. Increase budgets of those units and teams, making it easier to meet EDI goals.
3. Increase headcount for successfully hiring people of color.
4. Showcase EDI successes internally and externally.
5. Develop competition between business units. Accelerate the EDI progress of the highest performing units.

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.