

# LEADING THE CONVERSATION

 IF  
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Welcome to the Leading the Conversation toolkit. This toolkit has been designed in five bite size chunks to help you to act, facilitate discussions and encourage engagement and wider action around Black inclusion. By joining us on our journey of learning we can all work together to create more empathetic and inclusive environments.

We know that every CEO and leader is different and will come to this topic with varying degrees of knowledge. This toolkit will be a refresher for some and a valuable guide for those new to leading the conversation on Black inclusion.

## Understanding your role in leading the conversation

As a business leader, you have an important role to play in dismantling systemic injustice, not only because it is beneficial for your organisation and the economy overall, but mainly because it is the right thing to do for our society as a whole. Following the upsurge in the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, as a CEO your acknowledgment of what you know and what you do not know around Black experiences in the workplace and Black inclusion more generally, is a crucial reality to face. Be open to your vulnerabilities. You are not meant to have all the answers, no one does and there is no harm in saying that you don't either.

You know, as do we, it is about wanting to learn more and wanting to do more. Sometimes, it is knowing what to say, how to say it and most importantly – accepting that action is not a 'nice to do', but a 'must do'.

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## How to Lead the Conversation on Black Inclusion

### Am I ready to start the conversation?

Complete this short questionnaire to assess your own knowledge, reflect and take action on what you need to enhance to ensure you are fully ready to lead the conversation. Pledging your organisation to act is great to encourage commitment from your teams, but how can you personally become an effective and vocal advocate for Black inclusion?

By reviewing the scores you assign to each of these 10 questions you can reflect on your own knowledge and confidence around the topics of race/ethnicity and Black inclusion and focus your attention to key areas for personal learning.

|   | Yes/No |  | Yes/No |
|---|--------|--|--------|
| 1. I am confident with terms, language, and concepts around Black and racial inclusion.   |        | 6. I feel confident that I could speak confidently around the concept of intersectionality.                |        |
| 2. I feel confident that I could speak strongly about Black Inclusion with my senior team and workforce.  |        | 7. I encourage my leadership team to proactively sponsor Black and ethnically diverse talent.              |        |
| 3. I feel confident that I could recognise and mitigate micro aggressions.  |        | 8. Considering BLM and since BHM2020, I have made it a habit to educate myself on Black and racial issues. |        |
| 4. I feel confident I am checking my own personal biases (attitudes and stereotypes) that affect my understanding and actions.                  |        | 9. I feel confident that I know what it means to be anti-racist and act as an anti-racist.                 |        |
| 5. I feel confident that I understand what privilege is and I always acknowledge my privileges when engaging in conversations on racial equity. |        | 10. I feel confident that I know how to advance Black inclusion within my organisation.                    |        |

More “Yes” than “No” you are ready, however if more “No” than “Yes” it is important you strengthen those gaps and take personal action now to make a difference. Don’t forget, you don’t need to know everything to lead the conversation; in fact stating that you have done this short questionnaire is your first step in speaking your truth and providing visibility on the areas that you need to work on.

## Preparation is key

The adage “fail to prepare, prepare to fail” is very relevant here. Best practice for CEOs leading the conversation on race is to be as prepared as possible i.e. do your homework on where your company is on this agenda and more broadly. We strongly recommend if you desire to have a positive outcome, that you prepare, connect, get support, and prepare some more. If you feel like you don’t know anything, or you do not feel overly confident, or have areas that you need to strengthen, the preparation time you put in will play an integral role in increasing your confidence.

## Tips for success in getting ready to lead the conversation

- **Own it:** Those you lead want to hear from you. Be committed, visible and present.
- **Make time:** Make time to prepare. Leading a successful conversation on Black inclusion will only be successful and effective if you make the time to prepare.
- **Do your company homework:** look at qualitative and quantitative data to understand how you are doing in respect of Black inclusion. *Consider:* What is the culture of your company saying? Is it inclusive of Black employees? Has the company had open and honest conversations on Black inclusion/ethnicity before? What was the outcome? How ready is the company now?
- **Values Driven:** Revisit company values, your company strategy and diversity and inclusion strategy. *Consider:* how well aligned are they to Black inclusion? You are looking here to make sure that the company is explicit in being inclusive and it really does include Black individuals/ethnicity. Any conversation you will lead should be pre-fixed by the company stance on diversity and inclusion, your strategic goals which diversity and inclusion enable, and values driven.
- **Outline the conversation:** Consider the scope & purpose of the conversation. Give thought to what the conversation could cover. What would be a meaningful conversation? What are you trying to learn? or share?

*Tip:* To help your employees be ready for the conversation, lean into your HR teams, Employee Networks if you have them and lead them to consider conducting mini webinars, focus groups or listening groups. Use information resources on the intranet, as well as your communications channels to raise visibility of the topic.



## Tips for success in getting ready to lead the conversation

Example Opening Statement you might prepare:

*"Our company values are inclusion, respect, care, open, and courage. It is our values we need to now demonstrate to start the conversation/continue to have the conversation on Black inclusion. I want to listen and understand the experience our Black colleagues have and together address the opportunities and the challenges so that all our people not only feel valued, but respected and supported."*

- **Leadership Team Readiness:** Conversations on Black inclusion/ethnicity fall down when the CEO direct reports and wider leadership teams are not ready to listen and act on feedback. Ensure that those you lead are ready and conversations are held collectively and individually. *Consider:* What support do they need to get ready? Who do you need to lean into to help them get the support they need? Consider workshops for executives, or 1-2-1 coaching conversations.
- **Outcome:** Ask yourself why you are leading the conversation? What do you hope to gain or learn? What will you do with what you learn? Are you and those you lead open to taking action and changing the status quo?
- **Participation:** Who will you include in the conversation? Obvious it may be, but it makes sense to connect with your Black employees, a personal invite to everyone laying out your intention, outcome and openness to hear voices of Black individuals and allies to listen, learn and act together. In addition, you may wish to consider having someone support you in leading the conversation e.g a Black leader or external partner.

## Terminology and language

If you are not overly confident with terms, language, and concepts around Black and racial inclusion or worry about saying the wrong things, here are a few key terms to help your awareness and understanding. There are several terms and knowing these terms will give you a head start in your self-education. We know it can be difficult and uncomfortable to discuss issues of Black inclusion and race, but it's important that the conversations happen to get comfortable with being uncomfortable.

| <b>What can I say?</b>   |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| <b>Anti-Racism</b>       | Anti-Racism refers to the work of actively opposing racism by advocating for changes in political, economic, and social life. Anti-racism tends to be an individualised approach and set up in opposition to individual racist behaviours and impacts.   |
| <b>BAME</b>              | BAME stands for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic. Avoid using this term, they include some groups and not others – for example, the UK’s ethnic minorities include white minorities and people with a Mixed ethnic background. Tip! Refer to your people by their specific ethnic identity (for example, ‘our Black colleagues’). It’s especially important to do this if you’re discussing issues that affect Black employees, such as anti-Black racism. |
| <b>Anti-Black Racism</b> | The specific exclusion and prejudice against people visibly (or perceived to be) of African descent – what most of us would commonly call Black people.  |
| <b>Ethnicity</b>         | Refers to a person’s identification with a group based on characteristics such as shared history, ancestry, language, and culture.   |
| <b>Intersectionality</b> | Acknowledges that some individuals belong to and experience the challenges of multiple categorical and hierarchical classifications including but not limited to race, class, gender, sexuality, and nationality e.g. an LGBT+ Black Woman.  |
| <b>Privilege</b>         | Some people have certain unearned advantages and benefits over others simply because their aspects of their identity that society values over others.  |

| <b>What can I say?</b>    |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| <b>Race</b>               | A social construct/societal categorisation of individuals based on physical appearance (such as skin colour, hair type, facial form, or eye shape), ancestral heritage, or cultural affiliation.   |
| <b>White privilege</b>    | The unquestioned and unearned set of advantages, entitlements, benefits, and choices bestowed on people solely because they are White. Generally white people who experience such privilege do so without being conscious of it.   |
| <b>Racism</b>             | A system of oppression that upholds one group of people in higher social, economic, or political power over another because of a historical subjugation (domination) of the oppressed group due to the oppressor's collective domination.  |
| <b>Colour Blind(ness)</b> | Colour Blind(ness) or being Colour Blind means treating people as equally as possible without regard to race, culture, or ethnicity. Adopting a Colour-Blind approach to Race disenfranchises individuals of their unique identities and makes taking action to address inequality more challenging. |
| <b>Covering</b>           | Is the process by which people hide or downplay parts of their identity in order to 'fit in' with the majority.  |
| <b>White fragility</b>    | This describes the state in which white people are unable to cope with or process the information they receive about racism, whether that be lived experiences or racial disparity data.   |

## THE INCLUSIVE BEHAVIOURS YOU NEED TO BRING TO THE TABLE

Often conversations in respect of Black inclusion or ethnicity/race more broadly can be quite emotive and its imperative that in leading the conversation, the conversation itself takes place in a safe environment. An environment where you feel comfortable and psychologically safe as a leader and so do your employees.

Everyone should be heard and safe to share their experiences. Black, Asian and ethnically diverse colleagues should feel able to safely share lived experiences, their perspectives and not feel judged, or fearful of sharing.

### Your Role in Leading the Conversation

While you will be leading the conversations in essence this is about being present and ensuring the conversation happens, it is not all down to you. It is highly recommended and best practice for HR, employees, network leads, internal communications and employee network leads are involved and working in partnership with you.

### Inclusive Behaviours: what are they?

A set of behaviours which value, support, respect, and demonstrate fairness to individuals from all backgrounds, as well as recognising the challenges and circumstances experienced by different people from all backgrounds. Particularly individuals that fall under the protected characteristics, which is ultimately about understanding the lived experiences of people in and out the workplace which can only come through knowing the people we lead, and work with.

They are a set of behaviours which are fully demonstrated and make people feel included in any organisation.

Inclusive behaviours are those behaviours which everyone should demonstrate to each other. However, it mostly comes down to leaders from C-Suite down.

### Why CEOs and C-Suite leaders?

In various research papers on inclusive leadership, it has been established time and again that what leaders say and do makes up to a 70% difference as to whether an individual reports feeling included or not.

## What can I do?

The Inclusive Behaviours you need to bring to the table:

- **Open:** Suspend disbelief and defensiveness, appreciate what you hear even if you don't/can't relate to the lived experience shared. It's the individuals experience, accept what you are hearing.
- **Bring humility:** create the space for others to contribute at times and demonstrate vulnerability e.g "I don't have the answers and I don't know everything but I care".
- **Listen:** More than hearing but really listening, it is about being truly present, attentive and engaged.
- **Be Genuine:** More than lip service, it's saying what you mean, meaning what you say and your actions also reflect that. If you are not sincere those you lead will see through it.
- **Empathy:** True empathy is being able to put yourself in someone else's shoes, imagining how you would feel if you experienced what another has gone through, how would you feel if you were treated differently due to the colour of your skin.
- **Curiosity:** Genuinely interested and curious asking questions seeking to understand. We can't say it enough no one know everything there is to know about race and ethnicity.
- **Respect:** It takes courage to share experiences especially to individuals who are different than themselves. Show your respect, acknowledge the sharing, how hard it is to speak one's truth and experience and say thank you.

## Having the conversation and moving from talk to action

The ultimate outcome of any conversation on Black inclusion/race or ethnicity is to learn, understand and hopefully change what needs changing.

As CEO/C-Suite leader your remit is to ensure the conversations happen and you lead by example following a few principles in leading the conversation in a safe and effective way.



## How do I ensure I'm leading a conversation in a safe way?

### The Guiding Principles: Listen, Learn and Act

What is said in the room stays in the room; reassure confidentiality, stress it will only be key themes shared.

Positioning; make it clear why leading the conversation and why Black inclusion/race & ethnicity important to you personally and to the company overall.

Action oriented in outcome and intent. Make it clear it is not about having a conversation for the sake of having a conversation. The intent is to drive change and better inclusion.

Listen more and speak less, take time to reflect too, but don't leave too long to communicate what action will be taken, how, when, who is leading, and who will be involved.

If you had just one question in your back pocket ensure it's this one: What would you like to see myself and the Board do more to further Black inclusion?

Ensure all voices in the room have the opportunity to share and contribute.

## Leaders Lead

We appreciate that time is not often on our side, however leading these conversations requires time. Not every employee particularly Black employees will have the desire to share. However, the more you as a CEO/C-Suite leader are visible, communicating, authentic in your approach and genuinely demonstrating you are wanting to understand their lived experiences – the more progress will be made.

Good inclusive leaders will use their voice to speak up to ensure those they lead can use their voice and speak up too.