

CHAPTER 1

**This Book Is for Everyone, but
Especially White Readers**

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The topic of race and diversity at work is a BIG DEAL—every aspect of it: building a more diverse team, making your business more inclusive, recruiting diverse new talent, rethinking business practices to make them more equitable, and more. And yet it's hard to talk about. Much of the language of diversity and the very concepts that create problems around diversity, such as systemic racism and White privilege, seem to have been adopted by the progressive left and that's a turn-off to people on the right.

As you read this book, you may disagree with many phrases and concepts. You may have “diversity fatigue.” You may roll your eyes at the concept of inequity. Even if you disagree with the language or concepts, I know you'll be on board with how diversity can help grow your business: better employee talent, greater levels of retention and engagement, more innovation, better customer experiences, higher satisfaction levels, and greater sales and profits—that's language that *everyone* likes.

But here's some real talk: Most White people would rather *not* go there. They'd rather not talk about race and diversity because it's scary, exhausting, overwhelming, and “a pain to deal with.” It's easy to say the wrong thing and face criticism. And at some organizations, diversity training feels more like “shame and blame” than skills building. Of course, the situation for many people of color is worse—they are missing out on opportunities for networking, jobs, promotions, and income because Whites are reluctant to talk about and address race and diversity issues.

On top of that, diversity has now become a major political hot potato. Much of the world is deeply divided on the issue of race, and it is extremely difficult to say *anything* without alienating half the population. We've lost our way when it comes to having sensible, constructive conversations about race. That's exactly what I am trying to do in this book: provide realistic, doable, productive tools and insights that will help you have the conversations you may not really

want to have—or that you have no idea *how* to have. It's about *skills*, not holding hands and singing “Kumbaya.”

If you're on the left, you might criticize this book for not taking more of an activist view and for speaking and writing as bluntly as I do. If you're on the right, you might criticize this book because you believe that systemic racism is overblown, that it is just a new trendy buzzword phrase and one more example of political correctness run amok. Whichever way you lean, whatever you believe, this book will show you how to talk about race and diversity at work.

I'm White. I started writing this book primarily with White readers in mind, because White businesspeople tend to assume a White perspective on things. We don't know what it's like to be “the only” in the room: the only Black person, the only Asian person, the only Hispanic person, or the only Middle Eastern person, for example. We don't know what it's like to worry about being considered for a promotion, and then if we get it, worrying about whether we are the token of diversity and that our company can now “check that off the list.” We don't know what it's like to have someone at work tell us we should go by another name so that we blend in better. (Yes, this happens. My friend Leroy is a tall, dark-skinned Black man. He sells high-end luxury cars and has a strong track record of sales. His coworker suggested he would “do better and seem less threatening” if he changed his name to Doug at work.)

White people in leadership can be oblivious. It's not intentional. It's simply the lens through which we view the world. We can't *consider* different perspectives if we don't *hear* different perspectives. And we can't hear them if we surround ourselves with people who are just like us.

My perspective on diversity, equity, and inclusion comes from more than two decades of work on this subject. I'm a professional speaker and have written three bestselling books on diversity, all from *the standpoint of business*. I work with all kinds of companies and all kinds of people: large Fortune 500 companies and small business owners, diversity champions and diversity skeptics. The response to my books and presentations is always positive, especially among White people, because Whites simply do not know how to talk about race and diversity. When we don't know what to do, we do nothing, and that's not good for business growth and success. Another reason that

the response to my perspective on diversity has always been positive is that I don't try to change how people feel about diversity. People have very complex emotions surrounding this topic, from fear to guilt to resentment to helplessness and more. I start with one basic truth that everyone agrees with: *Business is not about dealing with the world the way you want the world to be. It's about dealing with the world the way the world is.* Framed in this way, the topic of diversity is more palatable to most people. I'm not trying to change hearts and minds. I'm trying to change *business*.

Make no mistake: I believe that only good things come from a more diverse workplace, and I cover all of those in Chapter 4. And I believe that we benefit as a society and as people if we make progress on diversity, equity, and inclusion. But this book is focused on the skills you need to talk about a key issue that affects *business*.

You're focused on this issue, too. You're on the first chapter of a book that will show you how you can help—*actually, truly, measurably, and meaningfully help*. You're a businessperson. The way that you can help is through your company, team, and customers. You can help create a fair, equitable, and inclusive workplace for everyone, and by doing that, you can literally help change the world.

Right now, you could be doing any number of fun things: playing with your kids, talking with a friend, making a meal, watching your favorite TV show, working out, researching your next vacation, eating ice cream! But you're not. You're reading a book on how to talk about race and diversity at work and hoping you'll get some insights and tips for making your workplace or teams *better*. Better for *all*. You are investing your time *right now* in learning how to talk about and address a topic that is important and *uncomfortable*.

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

For a while, it felt as if we were lulled into thinking we, as a society, had made some progress! After all, the U.S. had a Black president for eight years, so how bad could racism still be?

On May 25, 2020, we found out exactly how bad it could be. On that date, George Floyd died on a street in Minneapolis, pinned to the ground, as four police officers sat on him and one knelt on his carotid

artery. It took eight minutes and forty-six seconds for George Floyd to die. Later, we learned this was actually even longer than we thought: Nine minutes and twenty-nine seconds. *And we watched it happen.*

Suddenly, the problem of racism was no longer abstract. The terrible, awful, chilling, stomach-turning death of George Floyd made us—and *especially White people*—realize that, despite whatever progress we think we've made, the world is *not* equal for everyone. Many of us responded the only way we knew how: by saying, "Enough is enough" and "Things **MUST** change."

It was an historic moment. Millions of people took to the streets to march for racial equality. Thousands of companies and businesses took a hard look at their own organizations and asked, "How can we do better?" It didn't just happen in the United States; millions of people in all parts of the *world* marched for weeks, demanding justice and change. It happened in cities. It happened in small, rural towns where almost everyone is White. Old and young, of every color, every race, *everywhere*, said, "We have to do something. *Now.*" But what? What do we do?

THIS BOOK IS A STARTING POINT TO A MORE INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE

It's OK to be uncertain about what to do. You want to make a difference, but at some companies, the emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion has been heavy-handed. It feels like "marching orders" instead of being part of positive change. Perhaps you feel skeptical or mistrustful about diversity efforts, like you're standing on shifting ground, because at any moment, you could say the wrong thing and someone will yell, "Gotcha!". If you're White, you may feel like *anything* you do may be "wrong," misinterpreted, or misunderstood and backfire or blow up in your face. You may be nervous and conflicted because you genuinely and sincerely want to help and make a difference, but you don't know the way forward. And you're uncomfortable.

Whether you're White, Black, Indigenous, or a person of color, male or female, non-binary or trans, gay or straight, old or young, left-leaning or right-leaning, a leader or business owner or employee, this book can be helpful to you. You will learn what to do—and what not to do—to have constructive conversations about race, not from an

activism standpoint, but from a *business* standpoint. In Chapter 10, you'll learn the STARTING Method, an eight-step framework that will show you, step-by-step, how to become a more diverse and inclusive company, department, or team.

But to begin our journey, let's start with who you, the reader, are and what this book is—and isn't.

Who This Book Is For

Readers who will benefit the most from reading this book will fall into a few specific categories:

- The CEO, president, business owner, or business leader who recognizes that their company or enterprise is not very diverse and that this is a real business problem that negatively affects the organization's performance, growth, and profit.
- The executive who has been tasked by their organization to lead, create, expand, or improve their DE&I (diversity, equity, and inclusion) efforts internally.
- The team leader who does not have a diverse team and wants to change that in a relevant way, bringing new talent, skills, and perspective that avoids tokenism.
- The team leader who does have a diverse team, but recognizes that some members of the team may not feel included or heard or perhaps have not received the same chances and opportunities for professional development and advancement as others have.
- The coworker or colleague who is struggling to work alongside people who are different and is afraid to say anything that may not be "politically correct" because they fear being fired or labeled as racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, etc.
- The coworker or colleague who is culturally aware and sensitive to the inequity of others ("woke") and wants to be an effective ally to diverse team members.
- The person who wants to be a better neighbor, friend, volunteer, community member, parent, teacher, partner, client, customer, civil servant, business owner, or church member—in other words, anyone who just wants to be a better *person*.

What This Book Is—and Isn't

Let me tell you what this book is *not*. This is not a book about activism. It is not a book about racial or social injustice. While the very topic of diversity must encompass the *recognition* that our society, and especially the workplace, is not currently racially or socially just, this book will not be dissecting root causes, nor will it be lamenting the impact and effect of such injustice.

This is a business book. This book will show you, as a businessperson, why identifying and addressing your diversity blind spots is important to your business. It is a practical road map from a business perspective, not a bunch of theory, to help you get started.

I will take you through the problems that most businesses have with diversity efforts, the most common mistakes that businesses make when trying to create a diverse and inclusive work culture, and the obstacles that can derail diversity initiatives and give diversity a bad name.

This book is titled *It's Time to Talk about Race at Work*, but shouldn't we have been talking about it before? Yes. *Absolutely*. As a society, we should have talked about race a long time ago, and this conversation is long overdue. For businesses, it's been a challenge, because while many, many companies and organizations have created diversity initiatives, programs, recruiting methods, and training, they haven't done a good job with how to *really talk about race at work*, how to identify and work through the obstacles, discomfort, and tension to build effective plans that tackle these thorny subjects. Our inability to talk about race was the catalyst for this book, but I believe that it's hard for us to talk about diversity and our differences in general. Throughout this book, I will use examples of different kinds of diversity that we encounter at work. Race is the anchor, but women, people of color, LGBTQ+, those who have disabilities, those of different generations and religious groups, and more will also be discussed.

In writing this book, I found myself often overwhelmed with the sheer complexity of it. There are a million facets and layers and I struggled with what to cover and what to leave out. I could fill five books on this topic and never cover it all. This book is designed to get you *started*—to help you have the conversations you need to have

but are anxious about having. You'll become more comfortable with what is currently uncomfortable. It will provide you skills that can get us all talking to each other and maybe, just *maybe*, help in narrowing the huge divide we all feel.

You picked up this book for a reason. You're a good person—and you're also brave. It takes bravery to talk about subjects that make people squirm. It takes courage to say, "We can do better. We can be better." It takes commitment to start somewhere. So let's get started.

