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Your Inclusion Ambitions

There's a famous story about President John F. Kennedy visiting the NASA space center in 1962. Kennedy noticed a man carrying a broom, and when the president introduced himself, he asked the man what his job was. The employee, a janitor, responded, "Well, Mr. President, I'm helping to put a man on the moon." Achieving that sense of shared purpose is a foundation for true and lasting inclusion and belonging in the workplace.

Right now, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is our moon landing, and to make this mission successful we need everyone, from interns to executives, to contribute to creating a culture of belonging. Imagine that you have the ability to make work easier for all kinds of people in your organization, to allow them to use their skills and thoughtfulness for innovation and problem solving. Imagine that you can create a sense of psychological safety where everyone feels confident and comfortable to take risks, make mistakes, contribute opinions, and be candid about what they are up against. Managers have this power. You have this power. It starts with making a visible commitment to inclusion and belonging across your teams because work cultures are not all created equal.

Some people experience the workplace as it should be: challenging—it is "work" after all—and rewarding, if you're lucky. For others, that same workplace can consist of daily acts of microaggressions, gender violence,

systemic racism, and discrimination, and the nagging feeling that you're going crazy as you try to get through each day. Underrepresented employees across many workplaces feel that their ideas and experiences are routinely dismissed. These feelings of exclusion are among the primary reasons there is a revolving door of talent for employees of color. Over and over, outstanding people are hired for their magic—and then that magic is sucked dry when they are excluded for not fitting in in the majority culture. And when that happens, they underperform, quit, or get pushed out. Those are the circumstances for so many, and that's what I want to change. If you're reading this book, you do, too.

This book is full of actions, practices, and policies that will help you transform your organizations to be more diverse, equitable, and inclusive. But before you roll up your sleeves and start to act, I have found that reflection before action is the most effective path toward creating a culture of belonging. This first chapter is an essential moment of truth that will encourage you to act with intention.

We first need to clear the air and be honest with ourselves, and our colleagues, about why corporate America is so white. White people have enjoyed decades of advantages in professional workplaces, mostly through the systemic segregation of neighborhoods, schools, and social and professional networks, resulting often in white people only moving through all-white spaces, having all-white friend circles, and all-white colleagues. This chapter is about being willing to interrogate why and to understand how ill-prepared everyone is, white and BIPOC managers alike, to discuss the true root causes of this fact in a constructive way.

“What's one thing you like about being white?” That's the question writer, scholar, and TV host Dr. Marc Lamont Hill (2021) asked his guest, a conservative activist, in a discussion on race theory. The guest didn't respond, deflecting the question. Still, if every white person took a moment to stop and consider their answer, you could begin to understand why it's essential to confront racial inequity in workplaces.

I'm hopeful because I believe more and more managers are beginning to understand that they must first create a psychologically safe environment where their team members feel encouraged to be themselves and speak up at work, a sense of connection to their work and their peers, and that they have a fair chance to succeed. When you understand this and why it's

necessary to create a culture of belonging, why these actions will work, what challenges they are helping solve, and how they will benefit everyone, you will become a stronger champion, a better ally, and an enviable leader.

Get on the Balcony

Goals are necessary, and milestones are measurable, but the real transformation comes when you align them with the spirit of why it's important to hire, retain, and engage a diverse workforce. This requires you to recognize the biases and practices that have kept you from making progress and then designing changes to mitigate bias and microaggressions. That's when the work of creating a fair, equitable, and inclusive organization gets clear.

Ron Heifetz and Marty Linsky (2017) coined the leadership skill “getting off the dance floor and going to the balcony” in their book *Leadership on the Line*. They describe getting on the balcony as the practice of gaining a clearer perspective on the bigger picture by distancing yourself from the action. That is, asking, “What’s really going on here?” The operational pressures of DEI work, such as needing to show nearly immediate results in workforce representation, often mean that those tasked with achieving a company’s DEI aspirations must rely on quick-fix approaches that do not address the root cause of racial disparities in their organizations. They are pushed and pulled by events, people, and complex and often conflicting agendas. This often leads to misdiagnosed problems and well-known yet inadequate stand-alone solutions, such as diverse candidate slates, employee resource groups, culturally immersive programs, and unconscious bias training, and ultimately you’re back on the dance floor.

When you’re feeling lost or stuck, bring it back to the *why*: define it, and then refine and redefine the opportunities. Get clear on how DEI will contribute to your mission and performance, how you can solve smaller gaps before they turn into hard-to-manage ones, and what you will do to make your insights a reality for your business.

Getting on the balcony as both an observer and a participant takes discipline, courage, and a willingness to stay the course. Allow yourself the time to think, reflect, and observe the patterns of behaviors, norms, actions, and inactions to understand what is or might get in the way of dismantling inequity in your workplace. The best leaders, managers, and individual

contributors learn how to move gracefully between the balcony and the dance floor. Try this exercise to help you get on the balcony:

Define what you're trying to solve for and why:

- What motivates me to build a diverse workforce and inclusive culture?
- What makes me nervous or confused?
- What gets in our way as an organization, a team?
- What am I missing or have been unwilling to see?
- What can we accomplish that we have not thought of yet?
- What's working, and what can we share with/borrow from others?
- How do we bring others along?

Then get back on the dance floor to make interventions based on what you've gathered. Try building an opportunity statement:

- Creating a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace at _____ is critical because _____.
- As a(n) (individual contributor, team leader, senior executive) at _____, I will _____ and _____ and _____ in the next 6 to 12 months.

You can move back and forth, dynamically and collaboratively. When employees clamor for public statements, ask them to challenge their assumptions about how and where work gets done and the behavioral norms and expectations across teams. When executives are eager to jump into action, encourage them to pause, before jumping to action, to listen to what their team members need, to build solutions based on the insights they gather, and to show evidence of care even when they don't know what to say.

Center on what you want to achieve. Performative action won't do. You must answer that core question: Why do I want to do this? Followed by, Where do I want to enter this work? If your answer is: "I want to avoid being cancelled" or "I'm told it's important," you will not make the right choices or investments. Achieving a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace is not a box to check off. A common answer is that it's the right thing to do, but achieving an inclusive workplace is not just about ethics and morality.

“The work has to start with an internal focus before it turns to an external focus,” Freada Klein Kapor said to me in a conversation on October 15, 2020. Freada is founding partner at Kapor Capital, a venture capitalist, social policy researcher, and philanthropist, who has advocated for diversity and inclusion in tech since the 1980s. She adds, “While there might be a well-meaning leader in every organization, I think right now that the motivation is not to be the last one standing who doesn’t have a Black partner or a Black manager” (Kapor 2020).

Think about your vision; write down your mission; get grounded in your motivation so that you can better define your role in the inclusion revolution. Let’s start by acknowledging that we all have a lot on our plates, and that training, research, and resources should help lighten our loads as we explore new ways to be at work. So think about leaning into this work as a lifelong learning process to become a better leader and colleague. Don’t conflate perfection with your commitment to build a more inclusive and equitable organization. It’s a classic growth mindset, and having one is vital on this journey. “I’m not an inclusive leader . . . yet,” is what an elementary school teacher would emphasize; that’s what I want you to remember, too.

If you’re not yet sure of your why, know this: When we improve belonging and inclusion at work, success follows. Belonging improves retention: 42% of employees who feel that they are able to bring their whole selves to work are less likely to plan on leaving for another job within a year. That’s because, as data from Culture Amp confirms, people who feel they belong perform better, become more willing to challenge themselves, and are more confident and resilient. The positive stats keep on coming: workplaces with inclusive cultures are six times more likely to innovate and weather market change, and workplace engagement (an additional indicator of belonging) is closely correlated with increased productivity, profit, and innovation, as well as decreased employee turnover (Culture Amp n.d.). *Harvard Business Review* attempted to quantify this impact, stating that increased job performance, reduced turnover, and fewer sick days for a 10,000-person company would result in annual savings of more than \$52 million (Carr et al. 2019).

That’s \$52 million in savings just to help someone feel comfortable and safe in their place of work. The message is loud and clear: diversity and inclusion will bring profits and innovation. But it’s still not breaking through.

Doing good and doing well are not mutually exclusive. You should frame the value proposition of nurturing a diverse, inclusive, and equitable workplace as both the right and smart thing to do. You should aim to be the company that everyone else wants to emulate, the one receiving awards for the best workplace because your employees can share ideas openly, explore disagreements, and talk through tensions as a team, not because you had the greatest number of press stories. People feeling included, connected, and embracing belonging is not just a nice thing to do. It's necessary to heal the harm across workplaces, and it's a critical role of leaders who wish to build innovative and agile teams. It's essential to understand your motivations, aspirations, and privilege as a manager or coworker to eliminate disparities and inequities. This drives empathy, understanding, and, in the end, improved innovation, experimentation, and productivity. You reflect. You think and then act. Being at the forefront of this revolution will make you a better, more in-demand leader.

Your Mindset Matters

This work is hard, complex, and triggering. It fundamentally requires you to acknowledge your personal blind spots and your organization's cultural and systemic sore spots. You're going to have to confront deep-seated beliefs and unconscious habits, including guilt and shame, common obstacles to change. You're going to have to explore your identity and privilege in relation to others and ask for feedback you may not want to hear. You're going to have to build new muscles, including the capacity to interpret new information; to sit in ambiguity, conflict, and discomfort; and to determine what's possible when you witness workplace inequities. You're going to have to act on the new knowledge you gain and embrace and admit your fears about what change means for you. You're going to have to come face-to-face with the moments when you have been complicit by looking away or letting something slide. I know that may feel like a lot, but when you open your mind and heart to the possibility of making a difference in someone's life, the future looks bright.

"In any given moment, we have two options: step forward into growth or step backward into safety," said psychologist Abraham Maslow, the architect of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Safety looks like short-term policies and public

campaigns; growth is working toward finding the best solution, not the fastest one. Instead of clinging to what we can or can't control, or a fear that we will be dismissed for trying to be helpful, we can meet this overwhelmingly complex DEI work with curiosity, openness, and a willingness to adapt and build resilience and agility. I invite you to think more expansively and imaginatively about your role as a leader and individual contributor, whether conscious or unconscious, in creating feelings of exclusion or inclusion.

We all have the capacity to lead and collaborate fairly and with compassion. Whether you're a DEI professional or a leader, ally, or accomplice trying to cultivate a diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace culture, here's how you can get in the right mindset:

- **Embrace courage.** Know you're going to make mistakes along the way. Don't let the fear of putting your foot in your mouth keep you silent. Don't let it set you back—learn from your gaffes or things you might have not done right in the past, and make a promise to yourself to do better next time.
- **Tame your defensiveness.** Defensiveness is a natural by-product of feeling uncomfortable and questioning your privilege or your habits. Sit with those emotions, ask yourself what you are trying to protect and why, and watch for any tendencies to make excuses, deny facts, or blame others.
- **Be transparent.** If you don't know an answer, or are genuine about your desire to do better, say so. Transparency and vulnerability build trust, which is an essential tool in this work. Be frank about what you do not know, what you wonder about, what scares you, and what blind spots you are working on.
- **Own your power.** Know that you can make a difference and that it will take time to radically transform your organization—it's worth it. While it's crucial that your CEO and senior executives drive change from the top, a survey from BCG analytics found that 80% of a company's workforce is mid-level managers who influence most day-to-day decisions and culture building. Whether a manager or an individual contributor, you can be a leader for change.
- **Think like a beginner.** A beginner's mindset stems from a concept in Zen Buddhism called *Shoshin*: "Having an attitude of openness,

eagerness, and lack of preconceptions when studying a subject, even when studying at an advanced level, just as a beginner in that subject would.” It’s crucial to have an open mind and a growth mindset that enables you to be willing to experiment, seek feedback, and admit your fears and mistakes.

An important first step is to put your mind in an inquisitive, reflective state. Be ready to ask why; go deeper, question norms, assumptions, policies, and procedures. Question everything—even what I write here! Observe yourself and look for blind spots. Challenge my assumptions and yours at every step. Brain scientists have shown us that a remarkable number of things you do every day operate outside of your awareness—how you engage with the people around you; the way you conduct yourself in a meeting; the candidates you select for jobs; and even where, what, and with whom you eat. You do them automatically. You do them by habit. This is implicit bias, and you do it because your brain creates biased shortcuts to help you make decisions quickly.

Hold Up a Mirror on Bias

We can build real solutions only after we are honest about inequities and assumptions in our workplaces. Holding up a mirror (on you) and a magnifying glass (on unexamined behaviors, processes, and systems) can reveal discriminatory practices and blind spots. It will help you recognize how access and opportunity are granted or denied and the structures in place that enable some to be always tapped for opportunities, while others remain stubbornly invisible and at the margins. You will see whose conduct is challenged or welcomed regularly and how anti-Blackness (accepting the stereotype that Black Women are intimidating or angry), Latinx erasure (reinforcing immigrant and language stereotypes), or Asian expectations (buying into the stereotype of Asian employees’ lack of assertiveness) holds back BIPOC leaders.

Workplace inclusion, let alone a complete inclusion revolution, is a challenging endeavor because in-groups tend to reject or resist out-group efforts. Research on brain science has further confirmed the existence of an “us versus them” bias. Take this quote from Mary Casey and Shannon Robinson in

their book *The Neuroscience of Inclusion*: “When we meet someone and the brain doesn’t like their differences—the way they think, the color of their skin, what they believe, how they dress, or any other characteristics the brain perceives as outside its comfort zone—this is no small event. When the brain registers differences as discomfort, it sends an ‘away’ impulse and even regards these differences as potential threats” (Casey and Robinson 2017).

UC Berkeley professor John A. Powell’s work on belonging asks, “How do we build bridges?” In short, How do we move to a “we,” not “us vs. them,” mindset? He says that belonging requires us to hear others’ stories with compassion, and he believes that we can achieve belonging through “bridging”—the practice of turning outwardly to connect with others. This contrasts with what we currently see in the workplace: we turn inward, relating only to what we know and who we know, diminishing our capacity to listen and collaborate (Powell 2017).

This lifetime of social programming and biased mental shortcuts can prevent people from reaching their full potential and cause harmful setbacks. You can avoid the invisible barriers caused by implicit bias by pausing, reflecting, and taking different actions. It requires a deep examination of history, motives, and intentions. Preconceived notions, biased interpretations, and social conditioning can foster unjust practices.

The first step is rewrite the old rules. Stop saying (and thinking), “That’s how it’s always been done” or “That’s the ‘right way’ to do something.” Question a practice or policy’s origin. Does it still make sense to do things that way?

For example, when writing a job description or asking for referrals for a new role, ask yourself, “Why am I doing it this way? What am I missing? Whose voice or experience am I discounting? Who could I be creating access for?” We don’t have to continue with oppressive practices that allow inequities to persist. We can transform our organizations for good and in the process show up differently in our workplaces, families, and in our communities.

This requires a willingness to interrogate the ways your behavior or organizational habits may reinforce advantages for white coworkers and marginalization of BIPOC coworkers. It means recognizing that anti-Blackness harms and holds back Black coworkers. And that, as I’ve learned from Mimi Fox Melton and Karla Monterroso in “Equitable Workplaces

Require Getting Over Fear of Conflict,” it is up to you—the white or BIPOC manager—“to develop the skills and learn tools to help you discern between when you experience an emotional reaction because (a) someone has violated a legitimate boundary of yours, versus (b) you expect coworkers to comply, appease, and defer, and you’re not getting it” (Fox Melton and Monterroso 2021).

It’s rare for a manager, even BIPOC managers, to have received racially sensitive management training to understand how to do this; instead, we come up in a working world built for white workforces, and very few organizations have culturally challenged their racial norms. Unsurprisingly, women and BIPOC feel that to achieve professional success, they must act like white men.

Every employee deserves a workplace culture and manager that brings out their best professional performance. And no employee can bring their best selves and talents to the table if they feel they have to armor up and overcome their manager’s low expectations from the start. But just because you’re a person of color doesn’t mean you’ve known what it’s like to create an inclusive and welcoming workplace. You’ve likely learned to put up with a lot to survive all-white spaces, and there is a danger that you could be normalizing bad behaviors (“He didn’t mean it that way”).

My thesis, one that is widely shared in the DEI community of practitioners, is that racial inequity across all industries is a systematic problem; that a misuse of power is at the root of inequity; that to achieve inclusion in the workplace, we need to dismantle the stereotypes, practices, and systems that exclude; and that we live in a white supremacy culture that privileges white norms, values, and behaviors. When I say we need to adopt an equity mindset, that means committing to advancing fair outcomes for your coworkers. For all your coworkers.

Create a Road Map for Change

Companies are made up of people, and people are the agents of change. Period. For far too long, managers have believed that creating a fair, inclusive, and equitable working environment is somehow not central to their core job as a leader—that’s what chief diversity officers are for, right? As if their only job is achieving a particular operational goal.

Employees have become more vocal and persistent in challenging leadership on controversial issues—including immigration, harassment, reproductive health, and pay equity—yet we are all stuck in the gray space between awareness and effective action. There are reasons: a fear of saying the wrong thing, confusion over what to prioritize first or where and how much to invest, and frustration about the lack of impact of previous efforts. We need to get out of this space.

We all interact in workplaces and have a million opportunities to influence change. You can create change in your organizations through small and constant actions that change hearts, minds, and systems over time. Activist and author Angela Davis says we need to “make the radical imaginable” and empower ordinary people to put pressure on the existing state of affairs to create conditions for change (Capece 2018). She calls these practices “reform tactics,” though you may think of them as operational practices, such as designing new hiring policies, launching new management training programs, and setting targets for achieving representational diversity. I think of it as attaining the conditions for change, one effort, conversation, or key performance indicator (KPI) at a time.

Waiting for change to happen means releasing your responsibility to lead transformational, revolutionary change and be part of a thriving workplace. You must act—there is no other choice if you believe that building inclusive, equitable, and diverse workplaces is the priority of the decade. Reading antiracist books doesn’t magically turn you into an antiracist leader, just as reading about inclusive practices doesn’t make you an inclusive leader. But you can gain meaningful lessons and connect new ideas from reading books on DEI that can serve as catalyzers for personal change.

A thoughtful, committed call to action is what’s needed. Acting quickly and reacting defensively can feel right. But more often, a thoughtful response and an action plan to make things right is far more necessary when, for example, you receive a report of harassment or toxic behavior. Your key ingredients for success are introspection, thoughtful responses, and commitment to meaningfully and materially change what needs to change. What works best is not always what comes first—it’s what has the most lasting impact.

“This work needs to be done in the true spirit of reparations if we’re going to do anything differently,” says Kapor (2020). An exploration of

reparations acknowledges that institutional and structural inequities exist and that they limit people's professional opportunities. "It is as though we have run up a credit-card bill, and having pledged to charge no more, remain befuddled that the balance does not disappear," said Ta-Nehisi Coates (2014) in his article "The Case for Reparations." "The effects of that balance, interest accruing daily, are all around us."

What do reparations practically look like in the workplace? In relation to work, it is not about placing guilt on white people or as an excuse for BIPOC employees not performing their job duties but acknowledging that 400 years of slavery and subsequent racial segregation in our schools, neighborhoods, and workplaces has stunted economic and social outcomes for Black communities. So what's a business leader to do?

Shift your mindset to achieve fair outcomes for all of your people. What do they need to feel a sense of belonging and connection to you and your organization? Start with these questions:

- 1. What do your customers want?** The global audiences you build for, sell to, and speak to are diverse, and they want to feel represented. You can't do that if your company doesn't reflect their voices, culture, perspectives, and needs. If a high percentage of your customers are Black, doesn't it make sense to have Black employees contributing to marketing plans? They may be the best suited to understand the demographic and what they value from a personal and professional lens. Profitable companies understand that they must create room for diverse voices to be welcomed and challenged, for creative tensions to exist, and for excellence, innovation, and inspiration to thrive.

In 2014, Apple made a strategic acquisition to engage the Black consumer market, 71% of whom own smartphones. They purchased Dr. Dre's Beats for \$3 billion to add a product line favored by a Black audience and featured celebrities such as Kendrick Lamar in advertising. Apple recognized the purchasing power of their consumers.

Every company has a customer, and the most successful companies know to put that customer—no matter who they are, what they

believe, where they are from, what they identify with—first. Diversity of thought, experience, and background is good for business, but it's also better for your customers, who are your business.

- 2. Who are you leaving out?** The “smallest” changes can have the most significant impact on the most people. For a LGBTQIA+ event at Twilio, a cloud software company, an organizer taped a sheet of paper on a bathroom door that declared it “all gender” for the day. They never took it down. A candidate who interviewed there reportedly joined the company because of that sign; it was a literal signal of inclusion, and the candidate felt comfortable coming out as transgender. In response to that feedback, Twilio added gender-neutral bathrooms across the office.

Some diversity advocates use historic moments throughout the year to make inclusion sustainable in the form of Black/Hispanic/Asian heritage months, Pride month, women's history month, and so on. This must be done tastefully and sensitively—having Taco Tuesday during Hispanic Heritage Month is one big eye roll. Do something more meaningful. Several organizations such as Barclays UK have held global Wikipedia edit-a-thons where teams get together to literally change the narrative of history. Less than 20% of Wikipedia biographies are about women, and an estimated 90% of Wikipedia editors are men, so they set out to fix this and write and upload articles about women. Art + Feminism, a national campaign to improve coverage of cis and transgender women and the arts, teamed up with UC Berkley's Race + Justice edit-thon to fire up their laptops and add or edit articles.

- 3. What do your managers need to know?** Everyone in corporate America has gone through some type of diversity training. The truth is it's not working. Little research-based evidence demonstrates the effectiveness of generic training and cookie-cutter DEI practices. Instead, you need to tailor solutions to the individual needs of the people in your workplace. And you need to provide reinforcing mechanisms—such as continuous nudges and suggested resources for managers—to help teams integrate the learnings in their day-to-day operations and accountability expectations.

DEI initiatives that include bespoke educational opportunities can be a practical first step. At VICE Media Group, at the height of the racial reckoning that rocked organizations in the summer of 2020, I received multiple employee demands for anti-racism training. Why weren't we doing it, when everyone else was?

My response: We must get to the basics of how people manage, lead, operate, and hire inclusively. As an organization, we need a shared understanding of what we're trying to solve for and by whom. We have to be careful of what we expect to get out of training and research and the impact it will have. Training can introduce complex, nuanced emotions, new vocabulary, and an expectation for immediate expertise, as if a one-day exploration of racism at work is all it takes to turn managers into inclusive leaders.

Instead, leadership and management development should prioritize giving managers the tools to spot where changes can happen: Where are the most significant gaps in your company culture? What direct or indirect experiences at work cause racial disparities? What specifically do you want people to do, think, or feel differently after the training? Start by determining your focus, where your most significant opportunities are, and where you want to make an impact.

At VICE, we spent a summer listening to employees from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds and reviewing our employee data. We discovered that the biggest problems were caused by a lack of constructive performance feedback, transparency on how to achieve career progression, and management modeling of respectful and inclusive behaviors. My team worked around the clock to vet vendors and co-design curricula that addressed these management practices. In the fall, we launched training designed specifically for middle managers—inclusive management and belonging in the workplace—to strengthen essential management skills. Our goal was to avoid generic statements about bias and microaggressions and instead share targeted and practical tools so that white and BIPOC managers could better support and grow their staff of color.

By focusing on how to develop effective teams, we set a tone for a transformed culture that held managers accountable for leading diverse teams inclusively. For phase two, we strengthened management muscles through training focused on creating psychological safety and a sense of belonging through effective race, identity, and culture conversations.

Everyone's favorite part of the programs was interacting with their colleagues across the company. I also received the following feedback from white managers: "A very helpful tool to have on hand as we learn to develop new and better habits of inclusion." "The most impactful training I've attended in a long time." "I have already implemented some of the tips in my weekly recaps and am receiving better feedback from my team."

BIPOC managers also responded positively, mostly commenting on how glad they were to see these learnings delivered broadly across the organization. I know the feeling. I have attended my fair share of diversity workshops as a participant. While my colleagues of color and I often joked, "Hey, you're also here to learn about how to work with yourself?" we also learned about our own blind spots. When delivered with care and aligned with ongoing organizational commitments to DEI, this training can help build better managers of all backgrounds.

One of the critical blind spots many white people have is that all people of color come in at the same baseline into meetings and group discussions. Use these trainings as an opportunity to point out that women and BIPOC are conditioned over a lifetime to take up as little space as possible—so while white colleagues assume that colleagues are not interrupting or talking at length because they have nothing to say, the reality is that many women and BIPOC staff are reluctant to speak, even when they have great ideas. A useful leadership hack is setting up a norm where women and BIPOC are asked to speak first and are brought in by explicit invitation from someone in a leadership position, rather than expecting them to interrupt and dominate the conversation. Note: this doesn't work for everyone; ask your BIPOC colleagues if they're willing to engage or not.

Many BIPOC have had to conform to white norms to rise, so BIPOC managers may also need to find ways to create paths for people to succeed as themselves. For example, ideally BIPOC won't have to code-switch (the act of adjusting one's style of speech, behaviors, appearance, and expressions to mold oneself to society's expectations of a professional) in the future to seem "professional"—it can be damaging if BIPOC junior staff meet senior BIPOC staff who pressure them into respectability politics and encourage code-switching to fit in.

To help teams understand the nuanced and often conflicting emotions and experiences across our workplaces, I like to share these statements I've

gathered over the years in one-on-one conversations and presentations. How many resonate with you?

What We Feel

- “I’m afraid of being hurtful to others.”
- “I’m exhausted by having to constantly explain my lived experience in a way that others can understand.”
- “I’m over white men getting a trophy for showing up while I need to prove myself over and over again.”
- “I want to attract, develop, and retain a racially diverse workforce, but I don’t know where to start.”
- “I’m tired of being asked to do additional unpaid labor to solve diversity problems, when I should already be walking into an inclusive workplace culture where I can do my best work.”
- “I’m afraid of saying the wrong thing and making a mistake.”
- “I want to be an ally, but I don’t always know how to support BIPOC colleagues.”
- “I’m constantly worrying about being misgendered or dead-named.”

What We Wonder

- “I look for underrepresented talent—why can’t I find any?”
- “Why are we talking about people dealing with injustice in the workplace?”
- “Are our recruiting efforts lowering the hiring bar?”
- “How do I respond to being called out without doing further damage?”
- “Do leaders really care about DEI?”

The Belonging Effect

Belonging—a word I’m sure you’ve heard a lot—is key to creating environments where everyone feels they can thrive. Belonging is not just getting in the door and being invited to a meeting; belonging is the feeling that you’re respected, valued, and essential. An MIT study, “Acute Social Isolation Evokes Midbrain Craving Responses Similar to Hunger,” found that our brains crave belonging and social interactions the same way we do food (Tomova et al. 2020). Our words and actions must signal to others

that we really do care enough to notice—to see and welcome them for who they really are. To belong is not just to be a team member but to be able to participate in cocreating the workplace that you belong to. It's also consistently and universally tied to a person's workplace commitment, motivation, and pride, according to Culture Amp (n.d.), a culture-driven people analytics platform. Asking the question, "Will this help someone feel like they belong?" is a good starting place throughout all the work we will do together.

When I joined the workforce in 1998, I quickly learned that to survive, I needed to put on emotional armor every day. For years, I had to leave parts of myself at the door because it wasn't safe for me to bring my whole authentic self in. Like many women of color and other marginalized identities, I know what it feels like not to be included or welcomed into the social circles where networking and advancement thrive. And I was one of the lucky ones because I had managers who empowered me to do my best work, often advocating and opening up doors for new opportunities. But even they were unaware of the racial power hierarchies that kept so many talented people sidelined and marginalized. They were ill equipped to understand the stress of being stereotyped.

Covering, as coined by Kenji Yoshino (2006), is a form of identity camouflage where an individual downplays part of themselves, and code-switching has a profoundly negative effect in the workplace. I've seen too many women and people of color exhaust themselves by being constantly on-guard to cope with discrimination. Forty-two percent of women of color, 40% of men of color, and 40% of women of all backgrounds cited being, "on-guard in anticipation of racial or gender bias," according to a 2016 study from Catalyst. Other people responded that they felt on-guard because they felt as if their physical appearance, disability, age, or religious beliefs diminished their opportunities (Dnika, Thorpe-Moscon, and McCluney 2016).

Workers of color tend to be more socially distant in the workplace because they carry the burdens of past mistreatments or even just a lack of caring. When BIPOC staff are routinely forgotten on invitations to essential meetings, confused for event staff, or not approached to join after-work events, that stings. I've been there. When employees have to expend boundless energy to survive in their environment, what do you think happens to

their output? To their relationships with colleagues and supervisors? They cannot give their best 100% because they are working from a mental and physical deficit—they spend the majority of their energy on emotional and corporate politics, all of which can lead to heightened responses at the wrong times.

As I've shared earlier, as humans our need to belong is innate. We all want to feel seen, heard, and valued—that we deserve to be “here,” wherever that is. Have you ever felt left out, underestimated, or sidelined at work? Maybe it was when you shared an idea in a meeting only for it to be co-opted by someone else or simply ignored. Perhaps it was when you found out that a new team member with less experience was hired at your level and with a higher salary. I will never forget when I was brought in on a major project in my department, only to realize that I was asked to lead and execute a team project that I had in fact been previously excluded from for months. My teammates were already in the ideation process long before I was asked to bring my ideas. It seemed like including me had been an afterthought. In that moment of realization, my ego deflated, my shoulders slumped, and I felt socially rejected.

That isolation and lack of connection is the dark side of corporate culture, and most of us have been both victims and perpetrators. Hypocrisy runs deep: As someone who has been the leader of global diversity and inclusion initiatives, tasked with solving for and being the face of diversity programs across many organizations, I have faced my own inclusion battles. I have felt invisible and disposable, my voice muted by white men who had no trouble taking up all the space and air in every meeting and hallway conversation. Their sense of entitlement is rarely checked or questioned. But perhaps most painful was the silence and denial surrounding racial privilege and abuses of power that I have experienced from white women who advocated for diversity and inclusion but enforced expectations that I needed to conform to white cultural norms for how I dressed and behaved. Those who actively challenged gendered microaggressions but failed to do the same when I faced racially biased and inappropriate comments.

Barriers to inclusion tend to be invisible to those already succeeding in an organization. If you've navigated your organization successfully, it may be difficult to see how systemic and cultural barriers prevent some people

from successfully navigating your workplace. You've become so accustomed to fitting in to the dominant culture that you miss the cues and roadblocks others experience.

You may now be asking yourself, "Okay, I've reflected and have a vision of where I want to go. Where do I begin?" Use this book as a guide to starting to chip away at personal and organizational bias in norms, behaviors, processes, and structures.

Your road map to reflect, vision, act, and persist is unique to you and will serve you on your journey well past reading this book. I will share practices that can help you drive impact in your organizations. It is up to you to be selective by choosing what will move the needle for your organization and be disciplined in the execution. Make sure to pause and reflect as I've mentioned earlier. Inclusion nudges, unbiasing moments that matter, and small behavioral shifts can deliver change. Think of this book as a series of actionable nudges on your journey to culture transformation.

Your Road Map to Revolution

I believe that ongoing micro-moments of learning and action can change behavior. How we listen, teach, assess, train, embody, and test our courage affects our success in developing the cultural mindset shift required to dismantle racial inequity in the workplace. It can be done. It may feel overwhelming to want to do everything, to try everything, and not know where to begin. At the end of every chapter, you'll find nudges toward action to help create your own road map to revolution.

- Reflect and get clear on your ambitions. Ask yourself, "Why do I want to do this work? Why is it important to me? What can make it important? What are the roadblocks here?"
- Craft an opportunity statement. Creating a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace is critical because _____. Refer back to it when you're feeling stuck or tired. This will keep you focused, efficient, and effective.
- Confront your fears. What am I nervous or uncomfortable about? Will you let that stop you? Embrace courage, and know that you will make mistakes along the way. That's okay.

- Focus on your mindset. Go into the journey with an open mind and willingness to learn and grow. Practice saying, “I don’t know.” Think about what you can do to educate yourself, model inclusive behaviors, or change your mindset.
- Understand how deep bias runs in your workplace and the world. Start by recognizing your own blind spots and assumptions—question why things are done a certain way and how they might be done differently. Rewrite the old rules. Ask: “What behavioral changes and interventions will have a greater chance of achieving my desired results?”
- Stop one-size-fits-all training. Listen to your employees, learn from the data, and ask for what your specific organization and managers need to create a more inclusive workplace. Ask: “How can we provide support, surface issues, or push for changes through our day-to-day interactions with others?”
- Build bridges to and connections with your customers, your team, your managers. What do they need from you to feel valued, empowered, and connected to a shared vision and goals? Think about them as you seek to build inclusive teams where everyone feels a sense of belonging.
- Remember to take a beat. Look before you leap. Give yourself some grace to reflect before you act.