

MANAGER'S GUIDE TO INITIAL RESPONSES TO TIMES OF RACIAL TURMOIL

Suggested Goals for Manager Communications and Leadership

- Support the well-being of your team and their mental and psychological health
- Foster a team identity despite any differences in experiences, worldviews, education and comfort
- Ensure work is organized to allow for mental and physical health needs of affected employees
- Role-model compassion, empathy and vulnerability

Framework for Responsiveness

- Assume people have different comfort levels, experiences and beliefs and that everyone may be in a different place
- Acknowledge what is happening with some explanations around why it's important for the team
- Eliminate the emotional and time-intensive labor of education and explanations from employees
- Meet people where they are and make room for flexibility on day-to-day operations

Explain and Acknowledge What Is Happening

Do not assume all of your people and colleagues are in the same place or in agreement on issues. There are cultural and education gaps that make it difficult for some people to process and accept the extent to which Black and Brown employees - and their allies -- are affected personally. It might help to frame what is happening in terms of well-being and personal identification with the issues that have made this time one of tremendous grief and anger for communities. Further, for some people, policing and the protests are a political issue and they disagree with the idea that politics belong at work.

Address your entire team even if you do not think anyone on your team belongs to a community that has been directly affected by Covid-19 or policing disparities. Teams are part of wider organizations and people often work on multiple teams that are internal, or may involve clients and community partnerships, so the value of addressing the times is universal.

Whether you address it during your next team meeting or through an email, acknowledge the impact that historical experiences of racial inequities on people we know or might work with are causing significant grief and trauma. Also, acknowledge that not everyone might be able to identify with this, or agree, but it is important to honor and support those who do.

Accept that not everyone, including yourself, may be ready to share or connect publicly. Make space to support anyone who would like to connect and commit to holding a safe space for them to share and lean as needed. Let your team members take the lead on how they want to connect further.

Less is sometimes more and sweet and simple is the best way to go.

Things you can say:

“I want to acknowledge what is happening in our country, and in our community, and that our colleagues on the team, within the agency, at our clients may be experiencing tremendous grief and stress because of the historical role of racial disparities.

- For some people seeing recent videos including how George Floyd was killed are like a death in their families, and a reminder of long-standing issues of racism in society.”
- “I would like us to hold together as a team, and to be sure that we all have what we need - including privacy and the freedom to talk or not to talk.”
- “Please recognize that these times are difficult for many of us, on top of our new work realities, so don’t discount the value of additional help and managing your mental health. Remember we have confidential and free counseling help for you and your family members through _____

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- “I am holding space for anyone who wants to share or connect...”
 - “I understand if you need some time to process...”
 - “Would it be helpful if we moved some deadlines...?”
 - “Is there anything I can expedite for you...?”
 - “Would it be helpful if I followed up on (_____) for you...”
 - “This is just the beginning and we will work through this together.”

Eliminate the emotional and time-intensive burden of explanations and education. Be mindful of not placing the burden of educational and emotional labor about the issues on people of color. Share an article you have read, or add the link to IPG’s website <https://www.inclusiveatwork.com/racialequitycenter>.

Seize the moment and encourage the team to participate in webinars, virtual meetings, etc..

If you are struggling to find the right words, you can amplify statements by senior leaders and clients, or a quote from an article that really struck you.

Invite your team to share resources they have found to be helpful and maintain an open exchange about ways to better support one another.

Things you can say:

“I echo the sentiments of...”

“It’s unfair to place the burden of learning or making us feel better on people of color so I’m sharing some resources that I have found to be helpful:”

“I am having my own moments of upset/grief/anger/uncertainty/discomfort and I understand everyone might be experiencing things differently too.”

Meet People Where They Are and Make Room for Flexibility in Day-to-Day Operations

- Give people space to do meetings off camera
- Postpone high-risk conversations like performance conversations and one-on-ones
- Make it ok for the team to help each other out if needed
- Role-model by practicing your own down-time, participating in sessions and doing readings, and sharing what you've learned
- Thank your team members for their continued contributions and remind them that they are not alone.

Additional Reading:

<https://hbr.org/2020/05/how-u-s-companies-can-support-employees-of-color-through-the-pandemic>

<https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2020-05-30/dont-understand-the-protests-what-youre-seeing-is-people-pushed-to-the-edge>

https://www.talentinnovation.org/_private/CTI_EducateTeamsOnRacism.pdf

<https://www.vox.com/2020/6/2/21278123/being-an-ally-racism-george-floyd-protests-white-people>

QUESTIONS?

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