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Power Skills, Diverse Workforce Dismantle Racism

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Power skills, diverse workforce dismantle racism



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By Eric Waters – Special to the Milwaukee Business
Journal

In the wake of George Floyd's murder, multiple companies have issued statements condemning the evils of racism.

Unfortunately, many stakeholders may perceive this rhetoric as empty corporate social responsibility propaganda if not accompanied by substantive action. Here, informed by critical race theory and institutional theory, I provide some research-based recommendations to help organizational leaders to walk the talk and contribute toward lasting reform.

Law scholars Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman contend that racism is institutional, permanently woven into the fabric of American political, social, and economic systems. Police violence against Black people is merely symptomatic of this larger institutional deficiency.

Unfortunately, as organizational scholars John Lammers and Josh Barbour observe, institutional beliefs are enduring.

However, management scholars Thomas Lawrence and Roy Suddaby argue that individuals and organizations can engage in institutional work, or acts to disrupt institutions. Here are some strategies to

assist leaders in sincere efforts to
dismantle institutional racism:

Develop your power skills

Numerous studies point to the value of power skills, also known as “soft” skills. Power skills are complex behaviors that are critical to organizational success.

Emotional intelligence is one of the more pertinent power skills to exhibit today.

This means recognizing and addressing your own biases, empathizing with employees of color, and allowing them space to process triggering events.

Also, modeling ethics and integrity demonstrate moral competence and provide idealized influence. Finally, exceptional communication skills are central to building and maintaining the

workplace relationships essential for transformational leadership.

Embrace the opportunities of diversity, equity, and inclusion

As part of a business case for diversity, management scholars Taylor Cox and Stacy Blake argue that diverse companies exhibit higher levels of creativity and make better decisions. A recent study by Boston Consulting Group supports this, finding that companies with diverse management teams enjoyed higher revenues as a result of greater innovation.

Diversify your organization with people of color proportionally from first line to c-suite and board if applicable. Not just because it is the right thing to do, but also because it improves the bottom line.

Change from the bottom up

Before institutions can change, organizations must change. A diverse workforce is fertile ground to solicit input and direction for high-impact changes. Management scholar Paul Nutt offers a participation model of change implementation that empowers lower-level stakeholders to lead in suggesting and refining changes before coordinating with management for execution.

In addition to producing high quality outcomes, organizational scholars Katherine Miller and Peter Monge note that a participative process increases employee productivity and job satisfaction. Ask employees of color what they want, provide resources and guiding parameters, and empower them to drive

innovation processes.

When leaders in both the public and private sectors activate their power skills to move from transactional to transformational, realize the multiple benefits of a diverse labor force and management team, and foster a culture of bottom-up change driven by marginalized and/or underrepresented groups, they are engaging in the institutional work necessary to address institutional racism and its symptoms.

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