

LET US TALK ABOUT EQUITY AND RACISM

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The conversations around racism and equity are nowadays present everywhere in the US and even in the world. They are happening at home, in the workplace, in social circles, and even communities where silence was the norm. This is a good thing. The recent events have awakened our humanity and we demand action. For the blacks in America the journey has simply been too long, the battles too fierce, the inequalities too apparent. The dream of Dr. King needs to become a reality. Enough is enough. Where did we go wrong? How do we make it right? In this dialogue we would like to invite you to embrace this challenge as an opportunity, to move through a process beyond a simple product, to tolerate each other wherever the start may be, to commit to some steps that can get us closer to a hopeful, honest, humble and healthy humanity free of hatred and filled with love.

Equity conversations are difficult. Why are they? People of Color and Whites differ in their perceptions of race and inequities. Many are feeling angry, frustrated, blamed and/or defensive. There is a preference to address symptoms rather than the roots of social problems. People are more comfortable discussing issues of social economic status (SES), poverty or gender. Factors such as our ethnicity, gender, religion create our own personal identity. Some of these identities can be seen easily (such as race), while other are less transparent (such as education level). The discomfort sparked by conversations about racial injustice takes many forms. Some white people might be uncomfortable because they don't see themselves contributing to racial inequity. Others may have not accepted their own privilege. For some people of color, these conversations may bring negative emotions and personal experiences they would prefer not to relive. For others, they may feel impatient as white people catch up to their understanding of these issues.

Understanding racism requires for us to recognize the many ways it manifests itself: individual, interpersonal, cultural, institutional, and structural where differential consequences are created for different racial and ethnic groups. Racism is a system with its structures, policies, practices, and norms. We may also be familiar with terms such as white privilege, white supremacy, systems of oppression. They all have in common an element of domination, a quest for power that goes against what could help us better co-exist and get along: equity and justice.

Equality is sameness. Equity is fairness. We all belong to a group. We all have unconscious bias, but we each have a responsibility to prevent its unintended consequences. Biases don't make us bad; they make us human. Becoming aware of our biases is the first step to gain understanding of how they can affect our actions. Some of our biases are implicit meaning that they may affect our understanding, actions and decisions in an unconscious manner. This is why it is important for us to move to conscious awareness so we can act instead of react.

Learning how to create a few positive habits can help us manage bias and lessen its impact. Here is an invitation to explore what we call the **"Five A's of individual growth"** that could move us from awareness to action. Whether we are the perpetrator or the recipient of the aggression this less than a minute process could assist in taking full responsibility for an action instead of a reaction for which we may not have full control.

The first A stands for Awareness: "I have a sense that something is going on"

The second A stands for Acknowledgment: "I know that something is going on". This step offers the opportunity to bring thing closer to consciousness.

The third A is Acceptance: "I know something is happening and I don't want to deny it". This doesn't mean that I accept an aggression, the wrong I am doing, I am in a place of full consciousness.

The fourth A is Appreciation: "Am I that person? Am I better than that?". Now I am in a place where I can put a value on the person I am.

The fifth and final A is Action: "Now, let me own what I do". Getting from awareness to this point assist me in doing what I really want to be in control of. This is the power of acting right (or wrong) but I am not reacting but taking a step when I am ready to take responsibility for what I do and also the consequences (good or bad).

The following story provides you with an illustration of this process. The first flight to Washington on a Monday morning is usually a busy one. Being upgraded to first class was a real treat and I felt lucky because the seats on that section of the plane are usually occupied by white men on their way to their prominent functions in DC. When called to join our respective group, I lined up with Group 1. The flight monitor at that point looked at me and loudly stated: "I said group 1". Immediately I became **AWARE** that something wrong was happening. I **ACKNOWLEDGED** that this was directed toward me, bringing her words to consciousness. I was not accepting her wrongdoing but had to be honest and **ACCEPT** the fact that I knew that I was being discriminated against. I needed to immediately **APPRECIATE** myself as a smart, confident black woman deserving of the spot I had obtained. I had a ticket, I was going to seat in the first class cabin because I deserved it. Therefore, although angry about her behavior I did not want to react and meet her expectation to behave as a mad black woman. I was determined to go high and make her feel low. I took the **ACTION** that was most appropriate for me to get all I wanted as a smart black woman. I shouted as loud as I could "Yes, and I know how to count" and smiled. This response disorganized her and she started blaming her behavior on not having coffee yet and I met her embarrassment with a smile and an "I got you" and proudly walked-in and took my comfortable seat with all the "entitled" passengers.

Moving from awareness to action allows us to be, instead of not be. For example, when we say: "I am not a racist"; we are defining a state of mind or a status. To the contrary when we say: "I am anti-racist" this implies actions we are willing and able to take to own our identity. We must own who we are. What does it mean to be an anti-racist? What does an ally do? How can we move our humanity from a culture of hatred to one of healing? Take a little moment and reflect on those questions and come up with the answers that only each of us can find. The answers to these questions will start paving the path we are willing, ready and committed to take to be what we want to be. This power is inside of us. This is true power. It is not given but created and we have what it takes to get there.

Remember the conversations around equity and racism are not just uncomfortable, they require vulnerability. Being vulnerable is a strength, not a weakness. Discomfort can be enormously productive, though, especially when we move outside of our life experiences and validate what others see and have experienced. This is the way we will move freely from where we are to where we ought to be as human beings bound to live on this planet together.