

## **Beginning a Courageous Conversation on Race:**

### **Systemic Issues of Institutional Racism**

The nature of institutional racism and preference is such that those who don't feel it, often find it hard to see it in its practice. However, we all see the results of such institutional practices in disproportionate outcomes that are localized to specific institutionally identified Races. In short – we “usually” know racism when we “see” a racist outcome. The question remains: will the institution recognize its complicity; and, will the institution change?

#### **10 Signs of Institutional Racism:**

1. If you live in the United States and you have never been around anyone or very few people of color, you may just be a part of a structurally racist system. [You might also claim that some of your best friends are, but if you have to count, then there is still a problem]
2. When buildings are erected in the name of someone and the “someone” is never a person of color, then you might be sending messages to everyone about folks who are powerful, smart and valued. That is how institutionalized racism works.
3. When pictures of presidents, board members, award-winning whom-ever are hung, and they do not depict a demography that matches that of the state, city or the country, then your organization might have an institutional racism problem.
4. Look at the organizational structure to which you belong. If the organization is disproportionately White in all upper levels positions, and all of the folks in lower level positions are folks of color, then your organization may have an institutionalized racism problem.
5. Take a look at the hires in your own department. If it is all White, then you may just have an institutional racism problem. In addition, if the department has hired one person of color, and claims or believes that diversity goals have been met, you still have a problem.
6. When you and the administration can name the one or two folks of color who are routinely asked to reside on every committee in your organization, then you might have an institutionalized racism problem. [BTW, folks of color can name the one or two “usual suspects” in their organization.]
7. If those same folks who serve are always the same ones — the “usual suspects” — you might ask why? Often times, the “usual suspects” are chosen to serve because there are few folks of color in the organization, yet sometimes, the “usual suspects” are chosen because administrators are most comfortable with some people of color. Everyone has a unique biography, consciousness and reaction to oppression. In fact, those “biographies,” one's consciousness, and or disposition-ality, can resonate with those in power. In other words, the “usual suspects” will often receive nominal gratuitous rewards — appointments to menial positions, important hiring committees and some even receive “awards” for keeping their mouths shut. So yes, you may have still have an institutional racism problem.
8. Take a look at who receives highly honored awards in your organizations ... and ask why they receive them? [For instance, regarding institutions of higher education, look at endowed chairs, chancellor's professors, and even teaching awards]. You may have an institutionalized racism problem if there are few or no folks of color in the pool. Also note that if the award is granted for something diversity related, people of color tend to receive them. Again, see number 4 and ask whether the institution is rewarding the often

- accommodating “usual suspects.” Again, this may be an indication of a problem with institutionalized racism.
9. When you are constantly looking for the “right fit,” and the “right fit” tends to always look like the rest of the folks that you have hired already, then you just might have an institutional racism problem.
  10. When given a chance to hire someone of color, but instead someone from your hiring committee or upper-level administration chooses to make a phone call to someone that they have known, and again, they tend to “fit” and look exactly like the majority of the institution, then your organization might have an institutionalized racism problem.

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