

The First, The Few, The Only

Tags: [#diversity](#) [#inclusion](#) [#women-of-color](#)

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Dialogue

As late as the 1970s, only 2 to 3 percent of Boeing engineers were women.

Your experience of getting on an airplane.

The truth is, Corporate America has never actually fostered true equity—especially for women of color—and company cultures aren't set up to support us. " "

[david-schonthal](#)'s distinction of fuel vs. friction

Delusion: "We can't find you."

Where does this come from? What's a starting point?

Delusion: "I don't see color."

What's problematic?

When you hear that thinking -- what would you ask someone to consider?

Delusion: "That's too political."

Tell me about this.

How do you decide?

Delusion: "DEI will fix it all."

"Head of diversity" title has exploded in last five years. LinkedIn says it's up 107%.

Johnny Taylor Jr. point -- we're not going to reward diversity metrics -- that's just table stakes for working here.

Delusion: "You got white-manned."

When you are accustomed to privilege, equality can feel like oppression.

Ernst & Young surveyed one thousand workers and found that more than one-third of respondents felt their companies' focus on diversity lessened the focus on white men.

There's tendency among -- esp. businesspeople -- to see things as a zero sum.

Quotes

Highlight [4]: As late as the 1970s, only 2 to 3 percent of Boeing engineers were women. Vernā believes that if women had been involved in designing airplanes, the interiors would have been drastically different. As women, we would have somehow figured out how to design a stowage that didn't require us to stand on our tippy-toes and lift a heavy bag over our heads into that small compartment. "I'm pretty tall," she said, "but most women are shorter than me. And for many of us, upper-body strength is not our strong suit." She then added, "Who wants to feel unwelcome, not strong enough, like they don't belong, within minutes of entering a space?" As a petite, five-foot-two woman, this struck a chord with me. When dealing with my luggage, I often wish I were taller or wonder why I packed so much. I always feel a wave of relief when my bag is tucked away, and I can finally sit down, knowing that stress is behind me. Many of us feel that same sense of dread. The stowage wasn't designed for us, yet we start to believe we are the problem. Why do I feel like it is my deficit when I can't put my luggage up high?

Highlight [6]: The idea that the pipeline is broken and "we just can't find you" is a myth. Data shows people tend to correlate and congregate with others who are just like them. In 2014, the Public Religion Research Institute's Robert P. Jones noted that overall, white people's social networks were actually 91 percent white, and 75 percent of this same group had entirely white social networks without any presence from people of color. This suggests that white recruiters and HR leaders will also have significantly white networks, which therefore cultivates a white pipeline. Many of the individual WOC I met could easily name more than one hundred qualified people in their networks. White leaders simply are not looking in the right places. They are also creating leaks in the pipeline inside their own organizations.

Highlight [12]: For decades, we've been coached to believe that the meritocracy principles that underpin Corporate America don't allow for racism. We were taught to believe that Corporate America and capitalism are color-blind. Most of our white colleagues didn't fully accept that the experiences of people of color were fundamentally different from their own. Until the summer of 2020, most employees I spoke with said it was unthinkable to even call the workplace racist or talk about systemic racism openly. In the summer of 2020, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar wrote an op-ed for the Los Angeles Times where he explained that racism exists everywhere, "like dust in the air." We are so used to the "dust" that we don't notice it until the sun shines through and there it is, hanging heavily. There is growing acceptance that bias and racism exist in our operating structures and even governing structures, and that dust has settled in Corporate America, too.

Highlight [15]: According to LinkedIn data, the number of people globally with the “head of diversity” title more than doubled (107 percent growth) over the last five years. A few women of color said it was yet another example of expecting WOC, and especially Black women—who are the ones assuming many of these roles—to fix broken systems with little support or resources. Others, who would not go on the record, shared that they think chief inclusion officers are a bad idea because it seems to become that single person’s responsibility to fix inclusion, when it should be a C-suite issue instead.

Highlight [18]: When you are accustomed to privilege, equality can feel like oppression. And, yes, some white men may feel the pinch of their privilege shrinking. Some even feel inclusion programs put them at a disadvantage. In 2017, Ernst & Young surveyed one thousand workers and found that more than one-third of respondents felt their companies’ focus on diversity lessened the focus on white men. Remember my friend Walter, who thought my career path was set because I’m a woman of color? Businesspeople like him often see inclusion as a zero-sum game: if you get a promotion or an opportunity, that means someone else doesn’t.

Highlight [23]: When companies tell women of color to “be authentic,” this is part of the delusion construct we talked about in the previous chapter. Most companies want women of color to be their version of authentic, or “authentic within reason.” But being authentic actually means meeting the world on your own terms by drawing on your own history and culture in order to thrive. Dr. Valerie Purdie-Greenaway, associate professor of psychology at Columbia University, says, “The critical distinction is agency and ownership. It is a source of power when you shed how you are being told to show up and instead find your authenticity on your own and use it to actualize your full potential.”

Highlight [25]: Close your eyes and think of the word “executive.” If you are like most people, the first image that comes to mind is not a person of color or a woman—much less both. We tend to envision executives as white men because that’s how we’ve been conditioned. Whiteness is part of the “prototype” of leadership. Even as a former executive myself, I still have to consciously remind myself that I, too, fit the depiction of that word.

References