

# Right Within

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

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## Dialogue

There has been some progress, but there is still so long to go:

The State of Black Women in Corporate America report:

In the 2020 report, Black women held 1.6 percent of vice president roles and 1.4 percent of executive suite positions.

What do those numbers say to you?

Unconscious bias vs. unchecked bias --> CEO of DiversityInc,Carolynn Johnson

A theme in this book is what's not said.

When I was going through my struggle with Kerry, I had colleagues I thought were friends, but none of them ever stood up for me. They mostly would come behind closed doors and tell me how they felt sorry for me and how strong they thought I was being. But what I really needed was for them to speak up in meetings or maybe even go to the human resources department when they observed bad behavior. During that time in my life, I always thought Kerry was the problem. I was only able to direct my frustration toward her. Yet all of my colleagues who saw something and said nothing were just as much at fault. On my journey to healing, I also had to address that part of my pain as well. Those bystanders saw the racialized abuse and chose to do nothing about it.

When someone says something racially charged, one of two things tend to happen:

1. Everybody laughs
2. Awkward silence and then the interaction of meeting moves on

We can and should do better.

Manager's Pledge

I will commit to engaging in courageous conversations. They might sometimes be difficult, but I know they are necessary to create an inclusive workplace.

Kelly Charles-Collins about bystander intervention in the workplace:

1. Make good trouble (vs. I don't want to cause trouble)
2. You don't have to be the hero

I will learn to humanize the experiences of all my colleagues and seek to understand and listen to their perspectives and lived experiences, particularly when they differ from my own.

What's different about how a manager acts and behaves who does the above?

Even if I make a mistake, I commit to the daily practice of being a better manager who is committed to equity for all.

We're going to mess up. Kintsugi (KIN-SUE-GEE) --> Japanese art of mending broken pottery with gold.

I will share my experiences and educational journey to help other managers create restorative justice practices.

What's a first step on this?

We miss what's right in front of us.

What have you changed your mind on?

## Reserve

Oh how I wish I had been more courageous and told my colleagues that it's not enough to come to me privately and feel sorry for me when I was being abused. I wish I had told them the ways I needed them to show up for me. I didn't think I had the agency to say that. And, let's be honest, I shouldn't have had to say it.

### Manager's Pledge

I will acknowledge that I have biases that I need to understand and reconcile.

I will commit to engaging in courageous conversations. They might sometimes be difficult, but I know they are necessary to create an inclusive workplace.

I will challenge myself to hold other colleagues accountable when I have heard or observed racialized tones, behaviors, and actions.

I will learn to humanize the experiences of all my colleagues and seek to understand and listen to their perspectives and lived experiences, particularly when they differ from my own.

I will share my experiences and educational journey to help other managers create restorative justice practices.

Even if I make a mistake, I commit to the daily practice of being a better manager who is committed to equity for all.

Amy Edmondson is cited a lot in the book -- good related episode.

## Quotes

*Highlight [10]:* Recently, I was on a panel with the CEO of DiversityInc, Carolynn Johnson, and she said she didn't believe in unconscious bias, but she believed in unchecked bias. I wanted to throw my invisible church fan in the air when she made that comment. For so many years, we have made excuses for many of our white colleagues' unchecked racialized behavior in the workplace. And because many of us don't have the agency at work to speak truth to power without facing backlash, we try to pretend we aren't hurt and tell ourselves that our colleagues had no ill intent.

*Highlight [13]:* Many people of color have gone through life being told the greatest hits: "Just be happy you have a good-paying job," "Make it work," and "Keep your head down." Unfortunately, we haven't always been encouraged to speak about the pain that we have experienced, especially pain related to the workplace. It's almost like we've let society convince us that racialized work trauma doesn't count. In the Black community especially, we are often told that racism at work is "just the way it is." If you are told a lie enough times, eventually you might just believe it. And many of us have believed that lie and passed it along to others. The ugly truth is, too many of us have the scars to prove it.

*Highlight [33]:* I was often the only Black woman in the room, and I figured if I was going to survive, I'd better learn how to smile through the absurdity. You know those times when Chad or Cindy says something racially charged, intentionally or unintentionally. Then one of two scenarios takes place: (1) everyone laughs, or (2) there's an awkward silence and we move on to the next agenda item as if there was nothing to see here.

*Highlight [34]:* This brings us to another question we must wrestle with: Why do some white people give more care and humanity to those who are causing the offense than to those who are on the receiving end of the offense? Real harm is being caused inside of the workplace due to racial aggression, and in order to have an equitable workplace, these offenses must be taken seriously. Most people don't leave a workplace because they no longer like their job; they leave because of a colleague or manager. And what bothers me the most is that while women of color often have to leave a toxic workplace, the wrongdoers often get to stay and continue on, ready to harm the next person. Where does the buck stop?

*Highlight [42]:* The idea of psychological safety at work was created by Amy Edmondson, Novartis professor of leadership and management at Harvard Business School. She defines a psychologically safe workplace as "one where people are not full of fear, and not trying to cover their tracks to avoid being embarrassed or punished."

Once I started following Edmondson's work, I started to think long and hard about how healing is directly connected to a psychologically safe workplace. We would never debate that it's probably a bad idea to have someone who has a history of physically attacking colleagues continue on in the workplace. Physical safety should be an obvious company value. So why don't organizations take into consideration removing someone with a history of racially aggressing others in the workplace? Edmondson states, "Without psychological safety, there's greater risk of cutting corners and people getting hurt, whether employees, customers, or patients."

*Highlight [51]:* Oh how I wish I had been more courageous and told my colleagues that it's not enough to come to me privately and feel sorry for me when I was being abused. I wish I had told them the ways I needed them to show up for me. I didn't think I had the agency to say that. And, let's be honest, I shouldn't have had to say it. As I continue to heal, I might decide to write them all a letter that I never mail, just to release myself from the pain they caused. But in the meantime, maybe you can identify someone you consider an advocate on your team who can help you navigate those uncomfortable moments at work. When you start to go down the healing road, you begin to unpack all the areas that need to be addressed. Like DJ D-Nice says, "Sometimes you gotta let it breathe."

*Highlight [116]:* In Japanese culture, kintsugi is an artistic way of putting broken pottery pieces back together with gold. The reassembled pottery is often considered more beautiful than the piece in its original state. It is said that kintsugi takes work and a certain awareness, much like it takes to bring about healing.

*Highlight [118]:* At one point, I had pulled into a Target parking lot to stock up on some snacks and face wash. The police shooting of Jacob Blake had just transpired in Kenosha, Wisconsin. I was about to get out of my car, and I saw a white man and child laughing and smiling. I busted out in tears. I knew at that moment, there was only one America: one where white people are thriving and Black people per usual are trying to figure out how to survive. I cried a deep, heavy cry, and I couldn't stop. What broke me out of my crying spell was my blue mask sitting on the passenger's seat. I thought, Well, with these glasses and my mask no one will know I've been crying. And yes, this is America: the home of the brave and what I've been told is the land of the free. Yet many of us are questioning how long freedom will really last.

*Highlight [125]:* I remember early in my career feeling like I was walking on eggshells when a racialized situation took place. If I tried to address it, I would be met with opposition, and then the conversation would end with me saying something like, "Oh I must have misunderstood what you meant. I apologize." For the love of God, so many times we have apologized for their sins. We have apologized when we haven't even done anything wrong, yet we are met with having to make everything right and take the higher road. I am tired of it and you should be too.

*Highlight [162]:* • Don't take it personally. • You're so articulate. • That's just Tom being Tom. • Assume good intentions. • You misunderstood what I meant. Any of these five

statements could send us straight through the roof. The language and tone are dismissive and, more times than not, a person of color is on the receiving end.

*Highlight [163]:* Let's take a look at how this might work in real time. For example, your colleague says, "Sandra, you are so articulate. I just can't believe it. Where did you grow up?" Now, for my readers who are not of color, you might read this statement and see nothing wrong with it. Let me put you up on game. We, Black women and other women of color, hear these racial aggressions our entire lives. You might make these statements with the assumption that your Latina or Asian American colleague couldn't have grown up in the United States with English as her native language. Or with the idea that Black people don't know how to speak proper English, like being articulate is a superpower that many Black people never attain.

*Highlight [208]:* I've heard many women make the comment that they would rather stay with the devil they know. In theory I get that, but all devils make your life feel like hell, even if they are the ones you know. If you are already in a traumatized state of existence, I hope you won't rationalize bad behavior. If fear is holding you back from trying to strategize your escape route, let's talk about some ways you might be able to mitigate that fear. Because the last thing you need during your healing process is to deal with trauma while being scared to be great and have better.

*Highlight [264]:* Let me explain something. You sit in a unique position. You have the ability to grow, enhance, or stunt a person's career. I don't mean any disrespect by that, but the truth is the truth. As part of the management team, you hold a level of influence within your company or organization. You have the ability to be a partner on the road to success for a woman of color in the workplace. I have clear receipts of how Charles helped me. And he didn't help me in word only; he took action. You have to be the action verb. Being a champion will require you to help dismantle dysfunctional past systems and create new systems that don't oppress women of color in the workplace. For example, if you have someone on your team who is clearly causing racialized toxicity, choosing to ignore that person's behavior, tone, or language is not an option. It's up to you to set a healthy tone for the team's interpersonal behavior. That might require creating norms and articulating which behaviors won't be tolerated. Don't forfeit the team's development by never calling out those who are oppressing people on your team. And don't allow the oppressors to play the victim while bullying others.

*Highlight [266]:* Also, please don't think I am only here to serve as your drill sergeant. I am here as your champion as well. Often, I reference a book of leadership quotes by motivational speaker Clifton Anderson called *A Year Wiser*. In this book is a quote by a man named Darren Washington, and it says, "The sum of a man's life is the difference he's made in the lives of others." As a manager or leader within your organization, you have the ability to change lives and inspire those you lead. You have to ask yourself how you will contribute to leaving a legacy that didn't oppress women of color in the workplace. You also have to ask how you will contribute to ensuring that Black and Brown careers matter. Only you can answer those questions, but I hope you allow

yourself time to figure out what the answers are and take action. Take action by listening to women of color, educating yourself on women of color, and activating your partnership to advance and not harm their careers.

*Highlight [267]:* THE MANAGER'S PLEDGE • I will acknowledge that I have biases that I need to understand and reconcile. • I will commit to engaging in courageous conversations. They might sometimes be difficult, but I know they are necessary to create an inclusive workplace. • I will challenge myself to hold other colleagues accountable when I have heard or observed racialized tones, behaviors, and actions. • I will learn to humanize the experiences of all my colleagues and seek to understand and listen to their perspectives and lived experiences, particularly when they differ from my own. • I will share my experiences and educational journey to help other managers create restorative justice practices. • Even if I make a mistake, I commit to the daily practice of being a better manager who is committed to equity for all.

## **References**