

The Memo

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

Dialogue

A love letter to women of color. What prompted the book?

2020 the year. Election / George Floyd and Breonna Taylor / COVID. How has 2020 affected how women of color show up in the workplace?

Our good friends at Leanin.org put out a report in 2018 stating that women of color hold less than 11 percent of management roles, less than 8 percent of senior management roles, and less than 4 percent of executive roles in US Fortune 500 companies.

We're aiming this conversation at folks who have privilege, especially white leaders.

White people have to acknowledge their hand in this country's systemic racism. And to be clear, I am not calling all white people racist, but I am calling many accomplices. An accomplice, by definition, is someone who helps another commit a crime. When folks don't stand up against racism, then I consider them accomplices. You can't support me and remain silent!

What do white folks miss?

When I conduct workshops across the country, I ask women of color who are the sponsors, mentors, or champions of their successes. The answer is white men almost 99 percent of the time. Many white women desperately claim to be allies, but frankly, most of them have not done much to help advance women of color in the workplace.

Michelle Obama:

So many of us have gotten ourselves at the table, but we're still too grateful to be at the table to really shake it up

There's a chapter in the book for white readers. The title is "No More Passes"

Mindset:

As a first step, I need your mindset to change; no longer can you run to your safe space and assume we aren't moving forward in our careers because we aren't working hard enough or aren't qualified, or that we experience the same workplace inequalities because we are both "women." Don't you hate it when men make assumptions about who you are because of your gender? The same principle applies. Can I tell you how many times I've been at a store and have had white people walk up to me and assume I work there? Too many to count! The level of tone deafness is at an all-time high. We don't exist just to serve you!

Language:

"Articulate," "angry," "hostile," "hysterical,"

Let's talk hair.

Workplace politics always seem to revolve around our hair.

One size fits all:

One size doesn't fit all. The word "woman" in the workplace has become a one-size-fits-all sports bra.

We aren't invisible:

If you think back to the movie Hidden Figures, it wasn't that black women didn't exist; white people chose not to see them or acknowledge their contributions. And, for clarity, yes, you can physically see me, but the point I want to drive home to you is that the difference lies in acknowledging me!

Be better success partners:

Many of the most sought-after women speaking at conferences and writing books on diversity in the workplace are white women. How in the world are you going to advocate for me, present your inclusive diversity BS at the major conferences, and not have any people of color on your leadership team or in your personal life? How can you talk about diversity or how to make me feel included

when you don't even have any women of color to invite to your own home?

Self-proclaimed allies:

Other people can call you woke, but you don't get to call yourself that. I shouldn't even be calling myself that. It's lame as hell. Being woke doesn't mean you are putting in the work. Writing some enlightened essays doesn't earn you the badge.

What have you changed your mind on?

Reserve

Quotes from The Memo:

In my years in corporate America, I have found that white people want to feel like they know you. They want to feel like your "friends." As black and brown women, we just want to do our job, do it well, and get the hell out of Dodge. And if women of color don't act like we want to be "friends" in the workplace, then tons of assumptions are made about us—fill in the stereotype here.

I consciously knew that Minda would make white people feel more comfortable because it's almost like Linda. I felt Yassminda was too ethnic and would hurt my chances of being considered for the first round of interviews. That was a decision that I shouldn't have had to make to appease white people, yet people of color learn to appease white people at a young age.

For the record, there are consequences on both sides. If you choose to go the route I did, make sure you understand the consequences it could have for you on the inside. I might've been considered for more interviews by choosing to use Minda over Yassminda, but over time I hated that I had to even make that choice. And once I started to make small compromises on my name, it was easier to change my hairstyle to something that white people find more palatable when dealing with people of color.

When I entered into the workforce I realized that many of my colleagues came from privileged backgrounds. And their tone-deaf nature allowed them to assume everyone else must have had the

same experiences. My already shaky mindset then led to feelings of inadequacy. I didn't want these white people to know I came from humble beginnings. And Drake hadn't yet made it popular to start out from the bottom. I wanted them to think I belonged in their club. Some might call it assimilation. Would they accept me if they knew that my family had to use food stamps (I didn't want them feeling sorry for me), that I'm bad at math because we couldn't afford one of those fancy-ass Texas Instrument calculators, or that I went to a community college because I didn't have access to the same resources they did? I was constantly questioning my worth. I never vocalized it, but it was slowly killing me inside. I started to equate their privilege with my lack of privilege, and it got the best of me. What would they think if I told them I can't remember how many apartments or houses I've lived in because we moved so much, while they rattle on about going back to their childhood homes for the holidays or their second home in Aspen.

Quotes

Highlight(yellow) - Page 16 · Location 166

Our good friends at Leanin.org put out a report in 2018 stating that women of color hold less than 11 percent of management roles, less than 8 percent of senior management roles, and less than 4 percent of executive roles in US Fortune 500 companies. How would you feel obtaining all of this education and still not having access to more leadership opportunities—and sometimes we aren't even part of the interview process!

Highlight(yellow) - Page 17 · Location 181

Ask five white women to name five successful women of color in business and I guarantee they couldn't, but ask five women of color to name five successful white women in business and they could even add one for extra credit.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 29 · Location 385

In my years in corporate America, I have found that white people want to feel like they know you. They want to feel like your "friends." As black and brown women, we just want to do our job, do it well, and get the hell out of Dodge. And if women of color don't act like we want to be "friends" in the workplace, then tons of assumptions are made about us—fill in the stereotype here.

3. The Politics

Highlight(yellow) - Page 45 · Location 642

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decision that I shouldn't have had to make to appease white people, yet people of color learn to appease white people at a young age.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 47 · Location 687

Our counterparts Sally and Becky will never know what it's like to wake up in the morning and have to make the decision to bring their full black and brown glory to work or a modified version. They get the privilege of using Becky or Rebecca, and it won't dictate the jobs they can apply for or make hiring managers uncomfortable.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 49 · Location 709

She kept telling me about this report Catalyst recently released regarding women and board seats. According to this report, women in the United States hold 27.8 percent of board seats at Fortune 500 Companies. I told her that women of color hold less than of 5 percent of those seats. She seemed confused when I continued to remind her that she shouldn't say "all women" when she really meant "white women." White people love to make sweeping generalizations about "women."

Highlight(yellow) - Page 52 · Location 764

And if you are a person of color at work, you have to learn very quickly to manage your impulses, or you would cuss somebody out seven out of the eight hours of the workday. I am not saying let people run over you, but what I am saying is, think first and then choose the best way to respond. There are so many battles that don't require you to react. You are a big girl. Learn how to regulate your emotions, or you're going to be reacting to every little thing, and if people see you as combative, that's no bueno for your career.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 59 · Location 869

White people have to acknowledge their hand in this country's systemic racism. And to be clear, I am not calling all white people racist, but I am calling many accomplices. An accomplice, by definition, is someone who helps another commit a crime. When folks don't stand up against racism, then I consider them accomplices.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 60 · Location 892

At a young age, I had to learn not to take everything white women did to me personally, or I would probably have started therapy as a child. I mean, I did go to school with kids that had Confederate flags in their car windows and no one said one thing about that, but if kids of color came to school in Starter jackets, then they must be gang members.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 61 · Location 903

For women of color there is an imaginary line, and if we cross it and label someone racist or prejudiced at work, we might as well kiss our careers good-bye. It's the kiss of death to air our racial grievances. We don't have the luxury of using "race cards" unless they are absolutely necessary, and often, we just keep quiet about it and take the beating—because it's too arduous of a fight.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 65 · Location 964

I believe this is a common line of internal questioning women of color go through in the workplace when we experience racism. We want so desperately for “it” not to be racism, so we start to make up excuses for white people, and it even leads us to question ourselves. The thing is... we all know when we are being mistreated, but we still try and cover up the bad behavior.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 74 · Location 1128

When I conduct workshops across the country, I ask women of color who are the sponsors, mentors, or champions of their successes. The answer is white men almost 99 percent of the time. Many white women desperately claim to be allies, but frankly, most of them have not done much to help advance women of color in the workplace.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 82 · Location 1258

In 2017, the Institute for Women’s Policy Research and National Domestic Workers Alliances reported that 80 percent of black mothers are their household’s breadwinner, while only 50 percent of white women are their household’s breadwinner. This is just one of the many reasons the wage gap upsets me. Many of us are the first people in our families to graduate from college, the first in our family to go from lower income to middle or upper-middle class. It’s a wonderful feeling but comes with a lot of responsibility. Many of our families struggled for decades to overcome economic and social inequalities caused by inadequate access to education and housing and generations of incarceration. Black and brown women tend to hold their families up on their shoulders—so the entire family can advance.

8. No More Passes: For My White Readers

Highlight(yellow) - Page 124 · Location 1956

As a first step, I need your mindset to change; no longer can you run to your safe space and assume we aren’t moving forward in our careers because we aren’t working hard enough or aren’t qualified, or that we experience the same workplace inequalities because we are both “women.” Don’t you hate it when men make assumptions about who you are because of your gender? The same principle applies. And the last time I checked, “assumptions” still make an ass out of people! Can I tell you how many times I’ve been at a store and have had white people walk up to me and assume I work there? Too many to count!

Highlight(yellow) - Page 125 · Location 1964

Your vocabulary. “Articulate,” “angry,” “hostile,” “hysterical,” or any other derogatory adjectives that identify us as anything besides “God’s children” should no longer be used to refer to us. I was on a live Internet show, and the host said to me, “You are so articulate.” I wanted to slide under my chair. And most of my friends of color pointed out that comment first, as the congratulatory messages came through—many of my white friends didn’t even mention it. Do you know how many times I’ve heard someone tell me, “You are so articulate”? I would be a wealthy woman if I charged

every time a white person said this to me. For a long time, I was so confused, like damn, what black people are you meeting if I'm wowing you?

Highlight(yellow) - Page 126 · Location 1985

Next, let's talk hair. Workplace politics always seem to revolve around our hair. I don't know how many songs you need to hear to understand that our hair is off-limits! Hell, just keep our hair out of your mouth. Don't talk to us about our weave, especially if you aren't paying to get it installed. If you decide you want to start paying for my hair, then by all means, let's chat about it! We don't want you to talk to us about our curls, braids, or afros. Since I was in the third grade, I've had white people (men and women) touching my hair. In junior high school, there were only a few black kids at my school. Often, I was the only black student in my class.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 127 · Location 2001

One size doesn't fit all. The word "woman" in the workplace has become a one-size-fits-all sports bra. Up until not too long ago, I bought into this "woman" phenom. It was my entry point into feminism. I loved this notion of women's rights. Then, after years in the workplace, I realized all these data points were about white women. What the hell! How can you quote statistics and keep women of color out of the conversation? As Sojourner Truth famously stated, "Ain't I a Woman?" Those stats that are often quoted refer to white women, and white women create the popular career books and platforms.

Self-proclaimed allies. Another check that self-proclaimed allies do not get to cash is speaking out on matters that don't have sh—to do with them. Just because you've shown up a few times for women of color or we invited you to the family BBQ doesn't equate to saying whatever the hell you want about other women of color.

Which leads me to white women calling themselves woke. You found a word and you have latched onto it like your life depended on it. Other people can call you woke, but you don't get to call yourself that. I shouldn't even be calling myself that. It's lame as hell. Being woke doesn't mean you are putting in the work. Writing some enlightened essays doesn't earn you the badge.

And this, my friend, is The Memo. We can't be successful without being on the same team. I applaud you for reading this book, because part of being a success partner is owning some of your behavior and listening to our stories. You can't sit back with your white friends talking about what people of color need if you haven't spent time listening to our stories. It's not about shaming or making you feel guilty; it's about educating you on how to best level the playing field.

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