

EDUCATION

How to create a more equitable and diverse work environment

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Brands should use data to create a more diverse and equitable workplace. Image credit: TMI Consulting

By DIANNA DILWORTH

Luxury brands across the board have committed themselves to supporting anti-racist causes and that starts by creating an inclusive and tolerant workplace.

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Companies that have taken a stand to support Black Lives Matter should also be looking internally at the Black experience in their company to ensure that they are weeding out racism and creating an inclusive environment for all to succeed, creating workplace equity and accountability by looking at the basics. This begins by communicating with Black, indigenous and other minorities within the organization.

"The people on the front lines of your organization are going to know more of what they need than anyone else in theory, so soliciting their input about what organizations can do better is a good start," said Dr. Tiffany Jana, founder/CEO of **TMI Consulting**, Richmond, VA.

"Beyond that what we advocate for is people leading with data and the input of the people, even if it is qualitative is data," she said.

"You want to hear from people and you also want to look at systems and structures to be sure that you are minimizing any potential structural racism that might exist."



Dr. Tiffany Jana is founder/CEO of TMI Consulting. Image credit: TMI Consulting

Where to begin

Brands should start by reviewing HR policies and procedures and making sure that their handbook uses inclusive language.

Many companies have standalone diversity divisions, some have diversity officers directly reporting to the CEO and others house this task within HR. Their role is to think about the day-to-day lived experience of the employee within the institution and adapt policies accordingly.

When hiring, brands should make sure that they are casting a wide enough net to attract enough talented diverse people as possible.

"Everything begins with data and that way any decisions you make strategically are actually informed and grounded in reality," Dr. Jana said.

"If you are leading with data, you are going to be looking at not only very entry level what is our percentages of representation but you want to be looking at every single aspect of employee lifecycle, from the earliest moment of recruitment to the pools of candidates that you attract to the ones you actually interview, to who gets hired, how people are doing six months after they get hired, on through their retention and promotion experiences," she said.

"We want to break down those processes for any kind of subject type of variables, such as We do it this way because we have always done it this way."

The diversity division or officer should be reporting directly to senior leaders so that their agenda is proliferated and integrated throughout the organization.

Brands that put these structures and policies in place throughout the organization will be better prepared to create diverse outward messaging. If it is already on the agenda, marketers do not have to come up with a diverse marketing campaign to be trendy it will flow more naturally.

"If you are embedding these kinds of policies and structures throughout your organization, these ideas will more naturally start to occur throughout the entirety of the organization," said Milgo Yonis, chief product officer of TMI Consulting, Richmond, VA.

"The more that brands can ensure that that is the conversation that is happening all the time and a part of the systems and structures, the better they are positioned for the future," she said.



Milgo Yonis is chief product officer of TMI Consulting. Image credit: TMI Consulting

Partners and messaging

Beyond internal practices, companies have a legal responsibility to ensure that their employees feel safe and supported and that does not exclude vendors or partners.

Brands should explicitly state behaviors that are and are not acceptable so that they can lean on those stated values in the event of harassment.

"If a vendor or a partner harasses an employee, then it is the organization's job to protect that individual, that is no different when we talk about anti-racist support and anti-racist behavior," Dr. Jana said. "This is where it becomes important that institutions name the explicit experience that they want people to have and be very clear about the behaviors that they do and do not support.

"You have to be willing to lose money and lose partners in defense of human dignity, in defense of human rights," she said. "Part of the reason companies are so apprehensive about this subject matter is that they don't want to put dollars and cents at risk, but this becomes a values judgement."

Many brands are giving charitable donations to anti-racist organizations. But rather than simply pledging money to every anti-racist charity around, Dr. Jana recommends that brands are intentional about creating real action within their industry.

"It is OK to stay in your lane," Dr. Jana said. "One of the biggest impacts that we can have is all about creating global equity using the power of business for good. The biggest impact you can have is in your supply chain.

"Are you intentionally using a supply chain that offers fair trade options that are providing opportunities for economic empowerment for Black-owned businesses?" she said. "Are you sourcing things locally? Are you giving back and supporting in the communities where you are housed, the communities where you are sourcing employees?"

Before COVID-19 and the current civil rights movement, the spectrum of organizational inclusivity was somewhere between having a diversity statement and having a chief diversity officer. Now, things have advanced to having a Black Lives Matter statement to offering community reparations to empower and nurture the communities that are impacted by the luxury business.

"Committed to this over time means that when we see your ads and your models and all of the things that represent your brand, that they are not just going to be Black for the next six months but that we are going to see more equitable representation of this diversity of the globe across the board," Dr. Jana said.

"This should not be a temporary, Oh, look how woke we are," she said. "This should be a permanent adjustment that is followed by, and inclusive of, internal action.

"No matter what you do out there in the wider world, if your employees are going to look at your action and then run to the nearest newspaper and say 'Yeah, but they are treating us like crap behind closed doors,' then you might as

well have not even done it."

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