

Personal Practice in Working Towards Racial Equity

Racial Equity is only possible if as many people as possible are working together to dismantle the inequitable systems and structures that our country has built up over the past 400+ years of the creation of the United States of America. This requires a multi-pronged approach from many different levels. Thinking about how inequitable the world is can feel completely overwhelming, but we can't let ourselves get stuck in that space. It's important to understand that:

- a) These systems/structures were built and codified over hundreds of years, so change will take time, but if we're **in it for the long-game**, change will happen.
- b) **No one can do this work alone.** It's through our collective action that change will happen.
- c) If racial equity is the mountaintop, keep that vision in mind, but the only way to get there is **one step at a time.**

So, where do we start? We need to start with ourselves. The only way we're going to be able to do the collaborative, collective organizing work together that's necessary to achieve racial equity as a society, is we need to make sure we are part of the solution and not being complicit in what's keeping us stuck in the status quo of inequity.

This list is by no means comprehensive but these are personal practices that I've found can help and reminders to myself of what I need to focus on.

- 1) **Build relationships with others.**
 - a. The world is a very lonely place if we don't open ourselves up to others.
 - b. It can feel very vulnerable and risky to reach out but life's greatest rewards often come when we focus outside of ourselves and connect with others.
 - c. Find out what they're interested in, want, need, desire. And inevitably there will be some place of common ground where by working to help fulfill their needs, we end up helping ourselves in the process.
- 2) **Involve those you're trying to engage with from the very beginning.** People need to be at the table to make decisions together from *before* the start.
 - a. If you're doing an exhibit about Indigenous art, then Indigenous artists should be the curators to decide who, how, what, when and why before you've even made the plan to do the exhibit.
 - b. If your organization is focused on ending homelessness, before you meet with other organizations working towards the same goal, spend time in community with people who are homeless. You'll gain the most insight when you start by asking them what they want to share with you.
- 3) **Focus on what assets, talents, expertise each person brings.** Each person is unique and has something to offer. By taking time to focus on the value each person has, we'll be that much stronger together.

Written by Kathy Hsieh for *Walking the Talk: Putting Racial and Cultural Equity Values into Practice* Webinar, March 28, 2019.

- a. Sometimes people who are privileged do this work because they want to feel like they are bettering the lives of others or using their abilities to make someone else's life better (savior mentality). But the foundation of this perspective is that you have something to offer and the other person needs your help. So as well-meaning as your intentions are, you've already framed the relationship inequitably. If instead of focusing on what you bring, focus on getting to know the other person and discovering what their strengths are. By valuing the assets each person brings to the table, we are creating a system that is more equitable.
 - b. On the flip side of this, people who have been oppressed by systems can also end up buying into the premise that we are not as powerful, or don't have the resources, or are less than. We must stand up against everything in this society that has made us feel this way. White people are not better than people of color. Men are not better than women or people who are transgender or nonbinary or gender fluid or nonconforming. People who are able-bodied are not better than those who have a disability. Heterosexual people are not better than people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, polyamorous, asexual. This society's standards happened to be set by white, able-bodied, cis-gendered men. So as people of color, we need to include ourselves when we focus on what assets each person brings to the table. We are huge assets. We have as much, if not more agency than those we perceive as being powerful. We each have the ability to make a difference.
- 4) For any person or organization, **defining your core values** is going to be as important if not more so, than defining what your mission or vision is.
- a. Vision is **what** you're hoping to achieve. What will a racially equitable society look like? Feel like?
 - b. Mission is what you are going **to do** to achieve that vision.
 - c. Core Values are **how** you are going to go about carrying out your mission.

Values make all the difference. Our society's current values are steeped in valuing Capitalism/Money over Collectivism/People. We need to shift from Dominant Cultural norms to Relational Cultural norms so that "coalition building," "abundance mentality," "inclusive practices" are centered over "savage individualism," "scarcity mentality" and "oppressive practices and systems."

- 5) **Challenge the status quo.** Take time to question why you're doing what you're doing - if it's because it's what you've always done, is it helping you get to where you want to go? The status quo is inequitable, so the only way to create equity is to change the way we currently do things.
- 6) **When one strategy doesn't work, try another.** This is resilience. (Be like water.)
- 7) **Model the change you want to see.** Don't expect others to do the work if you haven't already tried it yourself.

- 8) **Be open to learning** what you don't know. Be curious. Making mistakes, taking risks, seeking guidance - these are all part of the learning process.
- 9) **Humility.** No one knows the answers to how to eliminate racism.
- 10) **Let go of your ego.** If you are doing this work to be the best or to prove that you're more "woke" than others, then you're complicit in upholding the white supremacy cultural norm of hierarchical thinking.
- 11) **Share credit** where credit is due. Many, many people have died fighting for equality. Many, many people have been doing this work for an incredibly long time. It is through their trauma and suffering that we are even where we are today. Ending racism is going to take many of us working together and we need to honor all the work that is being done in many different ways by many different people. Everything we do, small or large does make a difference, but it's all part of a massive effort towards creating transformational change.
- 12) **Both/And** rather than **Either/Or** - the more we can find ways to allow for multiple possibilities, the more inclusive and open-minded our thinking will become.
 - a) Get rid of binary thinking - everything in life is really a spectrum and far more complex.
- 13) Build in time for **self-reflection**.
- 14) Practice **self-care**.
- 15) Practice **gratitude**.