ADDRESSING + RESPONDING TO ANTI-BLACKNESS: SHIFTING FROM ALLY TO ACCOMPLICE

In recent years, workplace leaders have begun focusing on understanding and implementing **Anti-Racist** practices and policies across their organizations. In order to put *Anti-Racist* principles into action, and to actively support Black, Indigenous, People of Color — specifically Black people — organizations and individuals must address one of the root causes of structural racism in the United States, **Anti-Blackness**. Anti-Blackness perpetuates harmful stereotypes, systemically marginalizes Black people and aims to deprive Black people and culture of value and power. Anti-Blackness infiltrates every structure and system in America, including workplaces — often through microaggressions, micromanaging, salary discrepancies, and inequitable company policies. This guide provides actionable steps, tools, and vocabulary for aspiring **accomplices** *[An accomplice in the workplace takes the necessary steps to ensure that the workplace is safe from physical, verbal, and mental abuse. An ally will listen, and an accomplice will act.]* to begin taking in order to address Anti-Blackness in themselves, and their organizations.

KEY TERMINOLOGY

- **Structural Racism:** Is the overarching system of racial bias across institutions and society. They give privileges to white people and result in disadvantages to people of color. (*Source: Smithsonian National Museum of American History & Culture*)

- **Institutional Racism:** Occurs in an organization. These are discriminatory treatments, unfair policies, or biased practices based on race that result in inequitable outcomes for white people over people of color, and extend considerably beyond prejudice. These institutional policies often never mention any racial group, but the intent is to create advantages. (*Source: Smithsonian National Museum of American History & Culture*)

- **Anti-Racism:** Anti-racism is a process of actively identifying and opposing racism. The goal of anti-racism is to challenge racism and actively change the policies, behaviors, and beliefs that perpetuate racist ideas and actions. Anti-racism is rooted in action. It is about taking steps to eliminate racism at the individual, institutional, and structural levels (*Source: What Is Anti-Racism?*)

- **Marginalize:** To treat (a person, group, or concept) as insignificant or peripheral. Marginalization plays out by discounting the lived experiences, expertise, and professional knowledge of people from under-represented communities, particularly Black people.

STARTING POINT: 3 INITIAL ACTION STEPS

- **EDUCATE YOURSELF:** Educate yourself on current events so you can be aware and mindful of how systemic oppression impacts Black people. Take your self-education to the next level by continuing to expand your knowledge on Black identity, systemic racism, Black history, and the harm that anti-Black policies, actions, and workplace interactions cause. Self-education means taking advantage of books, podcasts, professional development courses, and other resources — not relying on your Black colleagues or co-workers to educate you.

- **ACKNOWLEDGE CURRENT EVENTS:** Acknowledge the harm of anti-Black violence and current events, but do not immediately go into too much detail (such as recounting details of an incident, asking impacted staff if they have seen a video of it, etc.) as this can cause additional trauma.

- **DON'T MAKE ASSUMPTIONS AND RECOGNIZE THAT BLACK PEOPLE ARE NOT A MONOLITH:** Do not make assumptions about the feelings or experiences of your Black colleagues. Black people are not a monolith, and your colleagues should not be expected to speak on behalf of all Black people.

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EXAMPLES OF HOW ANTI-BLACKNESS MANIFESTS IN THE WORKPLACE

- Black people, particularly Black women, face micro-aggressions in the workplace. **Examples of Common Microaggressions:**
  - "You're so articulate"/"You don't sound Black"/"You talk white"
  - "Can I touch your hair?"
  - "I don't see skin color or race"
  - "You should dress more professional"
  - Discounting the expertise and opinions of Black staff members.
  - Black staff being left out of workplace activities, meetings where major decisions are made, and social events.

- Workplace policies that reinforce the inherent bias of "professionalism" standards. For example, dress and appearance policies that penalize or prohibit natural hairstyles unfairly target Black staff members.

- Hiring and promotion practices that leave behind highly qualified Black staff members and instill a sense that Black people have to work twice as hard as their non-Black colleagues to be recognized.

- Black staff typically face higher rates of employment termination, micromanagement, and surveillance from their managers than non-Black staff. While trying to appear inclusive, this style of management presumes that Black workers are less competent and cannot be trusted with completing tasks.

- Black people are routinely under-represented in upper-management/C-Suite positions and are typically over-represented in entry-level and mid manager roles.

STEPS TO DISRUPT ANTI-BLACKNESS

1. Identify the Systems and Structures: Look at each structure and system individually. Think about how you contribute to anti-Blackness in those systems, and then ask yourself what you are doing to actively disrupt anti-Blackness in yourself, your team, and beyond.

2. Identify the Policymakers + Push For Change: Who are the policymakers and key decision-makers within your team and organization? Use your power and privilege to push for change.

3. Speak Up Consistently and Interrupt Anti-Blackness: Use your voice to interrupt anti-Blackness and microaggressions when you see them occur.

4. Harness the Power of the Dollar Support small and large Black-owned businesses, vendors, and creatives. Put your money towards organizations that are anti-racist, and that push for reform and racial equity.

5. Be Intentional in Building Your Network: Share your connections and resources. Actively engage with Black job seekers, LinkedIn is a great starting point! Use your access and privilege—open up your network to these job seekers.

Source Adapted From: Forbes - Recognizing and Dismantling Your Anti-Blackness by Janice Gassam Asare

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Smithsonian, Being Anti Racist

Forbes, Anti-Blackness

Supporting Black Staff in Times of Crisis

Building Anti-Racist Workplaces

Ally to Accomplice Resource Library