



DISCUSSION GUIDE: RACISM IN THE WORKPLACE

Date: _____ Jobsite: _____ Discussion Leader: _____

INTRODUCTION

This Racism in the Workplace Toolkit includes a series of toolbox talks to help guide the conversation through four key areas:

- Understanding Race and Racism
- Risk of Racism in Construction
- Inclusion as a Key Component to Safety Culture
- Deterring Racism in the Workplace

This guidebook and the accompanying toolbox talks are meant to serve as an entry point for companies to begin addressing the racism that has infected so much of American society and can all too easily find its way into the construction workplace. Similar to a safety stand-down, these toolbox talks are most effective when provided to employees in conjunction with a facilitated group discussion, either virtual via video conference or live on the job site. These toolbox talks are not meant to be distributed to employees to read on their own, sign and return.

It is important to recognize that this is not a one-time conversation, but an ongoing, open dialogue to lead to a deeper understanding of the impacts that racism has on everyone.

These conversations can be uncomfortable and unpredictable, so it is important to have the right framework in place before the toolbox talks are delivered. Preparing for, holding, and conducting follow-up for this conversation takes time and effort. Below are some steps for consideration when holding conversations around racism.

PREPARING FOR A CONVERSATION AROUND RACISM

IDENTIFY PURPOSE AND GOALS

Company leaders need to have a clear understanding of why they are having conversations about racism. Often, company leaders shy away from discussing racism out of fear of saying the wrong thing. However, having imperfect conversations is better than apathy. Employees can tell when company leaders are being authentic in their desire to learn and understand the impact racism has on the everyday lives of their employees.

If you plan to hold conversations about racism, make sure the conversations stay centered on racism. When individuals get uncomfortable, it is human nature to refocus the conversation to a more comfortable topic. However, you wouldn't go to a breast cancer support group to talk about Alzheimer's Disease. It's not that Alzheimer's Disease doesn't matter, but it's not the purpose of that specific support group. The same theory applies to this conversation. If you are having a discussion about the impacts of racism, stick to the topic.

If and when company leaders open the door to discussing racism, then they also need to be prepared to hear what their employees have to say and to act accordingly. Leaders need to be prepared to talk about inclusion as a long-

term investment that their companies are prepared to make and how it fits into their overall business strategy. Leaders should also be prepared to try new things, based on the outcomes of the conversation.

IDENTIFY A FACILITATOR

The fear of a misstatement should not stop managers from broaching the conversation. Identifying the right person to lead this discussion is key to a positive and productive conversation. Some considerations when selecting a facilitator include:

- To give credibility to the conversation, the facilitator needs to be in a position of authority, ideally at the executive level or senior leadership level.
- Pick an authentic individual, and one widely perceived to be open-minded and fair-minded, to lead the discussion. The leader should also be capable of providing an opportunity for all employees to share their personal stories, including any personal experiences with either racism or its effects.
- A good facilitator will:
 - Be impartial and objective;
 - Understand relevant terminology and model respectful and inclusive language;
 - Understand the history of racism and current day impacts (The facilitator does not need to be an expert but having a basic understanding will help establish authenticity and encourage employees to let their guards down);
 - Acknowledge and respond to diverse perspectives and experiences; and
 - Embrace and reframe conflict (Conversations about race can become tense, with individuals defaulting to positions of defensiveness. Discussion leaders need to have the skills required to direct that conflict from a defensive position and into solution-seeking one).

DEVELOP A TIMELINE FOR DISCUSSION

It is up to each company to determine how to deliver the four toolbox talks and the length of time given to each one. Remember, these toolbox talks are meant to serve as a starting point to a sustained company-wide effort to deter racism in the workplace.

SET GROUND RULES FOR DISCUSSION

Before the conversation begins, it is important to identify and communicate ground rules for the discussion. Setting up these parameters for discussion can help create a safe space for individuals to share their lived experiences. Examples of ground rules to consider include:

- Reinforce the purpose of this first conversation, which is to explore, to listen and to learn from each other.
- Discuss, don't debate. Participants don't all need to agree with each other.
- Recognize and acknowledge people's individual experiences. Everyone brings their own perspective based on their own lived experiences (culture, history, practices, upbringing).
- Listen to understand, not respond.
- Speak in "I" statements, don't speak on behalf of your group (we feel) or another group's (we feel) identity.
- Lean into the discomfort. Don't disengage.
- Don't assume intent. Recognize that everyone misspeaks from time to time. Ask questions to clarify someone's position.

- Do talk about impact. Acknowledge that people hear things differently based on their lived experiences.
- Allow everyone to be heard.

HOLDING SUCCESSFUL CONVERSATIONS ABOUT RACISM

WARM-UP: MEET PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE

Talking about race and racism can be uncomfortable. It is important to create a safe environment for the conversation. Start by:

- Acknowledging why your company is having this conversation and what you hope both the employees and the company get out of having this conversation.
- Asking employees to think about how they are feeling about having this conversation. Does it make them uncomfortable, relieved, scared, angry, hopeful, etc? Allow room for initial discussion about how the employees feel.

BRINGING “OUTSIDERS” INTO THE CONVERSATION

Most often when talking about diversity and inclusion, discussion leaders focus on the experiences of racial or ethnic minorities, sidelining others from the conversation. This leaves some feeling like “outsiders” to the conversation and allows them to sit back and be casual observers.

But, in order for diversity and inclusion efforts to be successful, companies need everyone to be active participants who challenge and educate each other. This is especially true in companies where members of one particular group hold the majority of the leadership positions, putting them in the strongest position to sustain an inclusive culture.

GUIDELINES FOR TOOLBOX TALK 1: UNDERSTANDING RACE & RACISM

This toolbox talk is meant to set the stage for discussion by ensuring everyone is working from the same set of definitions. This toolbox talk is a great place to clarify any questions about what certain terms mean.

Utilize the discussion questions on the toolbox talk to allow employees time for some self-reflection. It is important to assess where people are in this conversation. Allow individuals time to reflect on their thoughts, feelings and actions. Remember, this conversation is not about shaming and blaming, but setting context to understand the past, learn from mistakes and make changes to be better moving forward.

GUIDELINES FOR TOOLBOX TALK 2: THE RISK OF RACISM IN CONSTRUCTION

This toolbox talk discusses ways that racism can infect a company. These five scenarios are meant to serve as a jumping off point for deeper conversation about the effects of racism in the workplace. During this conversation, individuals may share their own experiences of either being the target of, or witness to, incidents of racism.

During these discussions it is important to adopt a learner’s mindset. It is common for individuals to provide an alternative explanation for the intent of the comments or actions outlined in the scenarios. This is where it is important for the discussion leader to understand intent versus impact and to center these conversations over impact. Even in the scenarios where the individual may have been well-meaning or well-intentioned, the impact on others is still destructive. It is important to remember that these discussions are not meant to shame and blame but to grow understanding and awareness.

Use the discussion questions on the toolbox talk to talk about the impact these incidents have on individuals. This is a great place to lift up voices that tend to be silenced, not by coercing individuals to share their experiences, but by creating a safe place for them to do so.

This can be a heavy conversation and some of these scenarios may trigger emotions. It is important to build into this conversation time for self-reflection and employee check-ins.

GUIDELINES FOR TOOLBOX TALK 3: INCLUSION AS A KEY COMPONENT TO SAFETY CULTURE

The construction industry already has a strong record on building a safety culture that limits physical hazards for workers on a job site. Companies now need to expand their safety culture beyond physical safety and focus on mental and emotional safety as well.

Use the scenario in this toolbox talk to invite discussion on how incidents of racism can affect the mindset of all workers on a job site. Use the discussion questions to discuss how each of the hypothetical scenarios might affect each group of worker's mental wellbeing and, potentially, their job performance due to the distraction. Other questions to discuss include:

1. When does a skill or safety check of a new hire become a form of harassment, hazing or bullying?
2. How is a worker's mental and emotional wellbeing eroded over time if a company fails to address situations like this?
3. What can be done to stop any harassment from continuing?
4. What can be done to prevent any harassment from occurring in the first place?

The main takeaway for participants is that incidents of racism don't just affect the people they target. They affect everyone who is witness to the incident.



GUIDELINES FOR TOOLBOX TALK 4: DETERRING RACISM IN THE WORKPLACE

This toolbox talk provides strategies on how employees can be active allies against the risk that racism will infect their workplaces. It is important for the facilitator to understand and acknowledge the reasons why an employee might not intervene in a situation. Use this toolbox talk to have a discussion about what barriers might exist on a jobsite or in an office space, and how an employee could overcome those barriers. Use the scenarios in toolbox talks 2 and 3 to discuss strategies employees can use in those situations to intervene safely.

In addition, walk through your own company's reporting process or procedures for handling incidents of racism. If you don't have a defined process, use this as an opportunity to announce your company's plan to create such a process – by obtaining employee buy-in and recommendations for what that process should look like.

Additional discussion questions to consider during this toolbox talk include:

1. What makes you feel included in the workplace?
2. What proactive steps can you take to establish a culture of inclusion, to prevent any acts of racism from happening?
3. What sort of language can make a difference in tackling racism?
4. Who can people talk to about racism?

5. Do you feel comfortable and confident using the existing systems in place to deal with formal complaints of racism? Why or why not?

It is also important for your company leaders to clearly communicate their support for individuals coming forward to report any incidents of racism, their commitment to investigate these incidents and take appropriate action, and that employees who report these incidents will be free from any fear of retaliation.

WRAPPING UP THE CONVERSATION

It's important to put the spotlight back on your company to identify next steps for preventing racism from infecting the workplace. Questions to consider include:

1. What next steps should the company prioritize going forward?
2. What should the company's leaders be aware of following this conversation?
3. Would the company benefit from an internal working group to coordinate further planning and action?

Lastly, leave the conversations on a positive note and build in some time for final thoughts and reflection. As the facilitator, be sure to extend gratitude to everyone for their participation. Potential closing discussion questions include:

1. How has this conversation impacted you? What is one word to summarize your feelings about this experience?
2. What have you learned or what is your one takeaway from the conversation?
3. Are there any actions you are inspired to take as a result of the conversation?

FOLLOW-UP AND NEXT STEPS

These discussions are a great starting point to identifying next steps but become meaningless without tangible next steps. Some suggested next steps include:

- Develop an incident investigation policy or procedure, similar to a safety incident response manual
- Consider the possibility of including diversity & inclusion, acceptable behavior, harassment and/or Culture of CARE-specific language in subcontracts
- Create an internal working group to maintain momentum
- Update employee handbook to include diversity & inclusion and/or employee behavior policies
- Consider company employee and leadership diversity goals
- Consider company supplier/subcontractor diversity goals
- Implement ongoing training and education for employees

As stated above, it is important that company leaders realize this is not a one-time discussion, but an ongoing commitment to making company-wide policy and programmatic changes. This guide is intended to help your company establish a thoughtful, impact-focused action plan for insulating the construction workplace from the effects of racism.