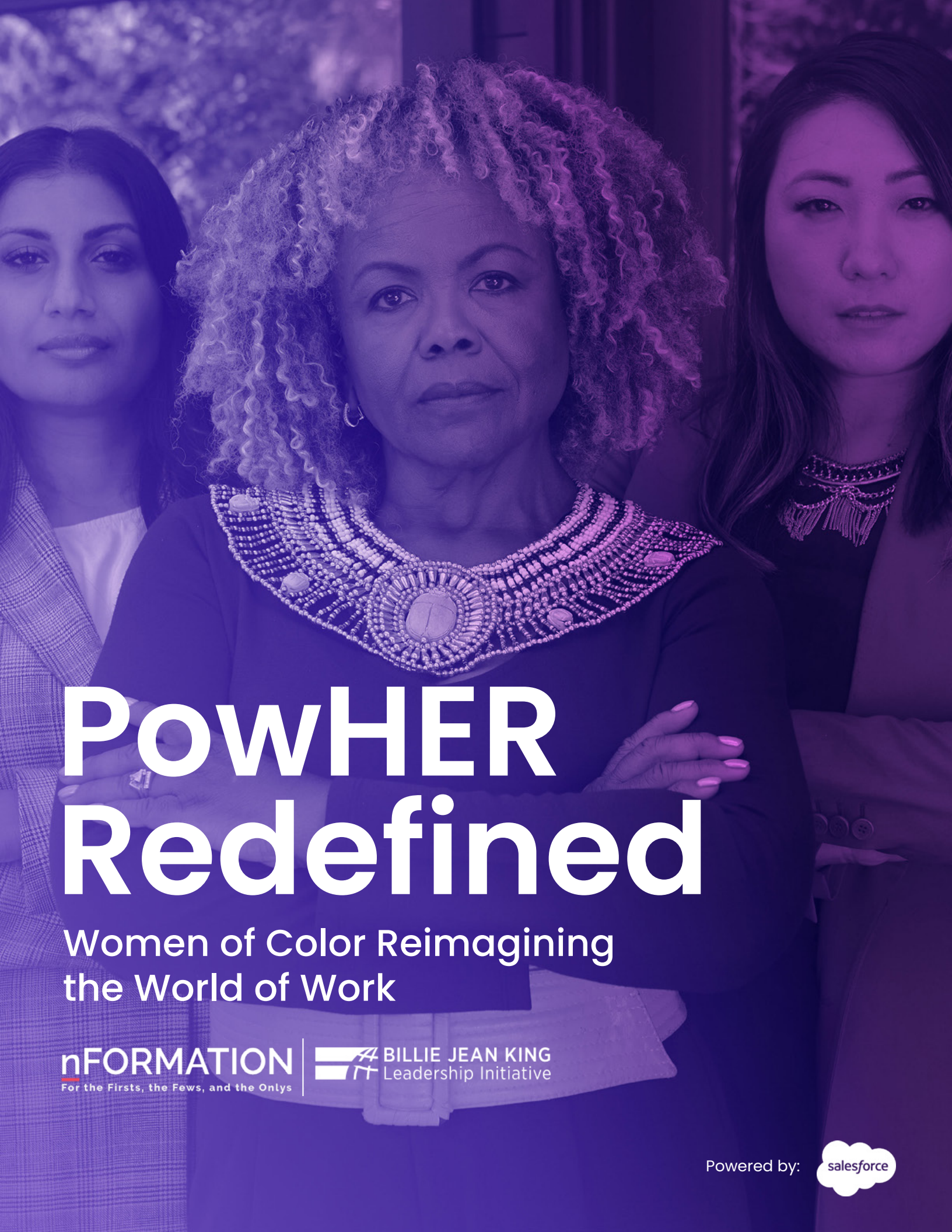




POWHER Redefined

Women of Color Reimagining
the World of Work

nFORMATION
For the Firsts, the Fews, and the Onlys



BILLIE JEAN KING
Leadership Initiative

Powered by:

salesforce

Leaders & Co-Conspirators in the Making,

We created nFormation to foster a safe, brave, and new space for Women of Color (WOC) to come together in community at a time when we believe our leadership is needed most. As a community of ambitious and barrier-breaking WOC, we know what it feels like to be the first, one of a few, or the only in our workplaces.

We know how it feels to be underestimated and undervalued.

The last 19 months have taught us so much and we are ready to mobilize our individual and collective power. People are listening in ways like never before. The time for change is now and this is our moment.

This white paper is the truth for WOC at work.

We created a think tank to survey more than 1,500 women of varying ethnicities and races and we also conducted salons to understand the experiences WOC had working for you. One woman called this process “cathartic” because she’d never been asked questions like this before and never been able to offer solutions to her employer.

This white paper focuses on women because we strongly believe there is so much we can do together to make change. To our white male leaders, many of you still hold the majority of power. What if you knew that you couldn’t lose, even if you shared some of that power; or participated in a new, more inclusive definition of power and leadership that grows your business and benefits all?

We want to thank the Women of Color who contributed their voices to this work and those who came before us. You’ve laid the foundation for us to revolutionize and humanize the world of work. And, we thank the white women who took part in this think tank. This is what it means to be a Co-Conspirator.

We want to thank the Billie Jean King Leadership Initiative for partnering with us to transform how Corporate America gets the proverbial job done, and Salesforce for being an important champion of this work.

Let’s change workplaces—to make work, work for ALL!



Deepa
Purushothaman
Co-founder,
nFormation



Rha
Goddess
Co-founder,
nFormation



Billie Jean King
Founder, BJK Leadership Initiative,
Social Justice Champion

My Fellow Changemakers,

The Billie Jean King Leadership Initiative was founded in 2014 to ignite dialogue, action, and accountability through research, partnerships, and commitments. We are dedicated to being leaders in the workplace and in life, and it’s these principles of leadership that define who we are.

Leadership is about people, access, and equity, and we need to LISTEN, LEARN and LEAD, together more than ever.

Each of us is an influencer and everyone can impact change. We can never discount the gender and racial bias that is among us and how it impacts our ability to lead.

This has never been more apparent than with Women of Color and the experiences they face in workplaces today. The overall gains in representation for women haven’t translated to gains for WOC. They lose ground at every step—from the entry level to the C-suite, the representation of WOC drops off by more than 75 percent. Women of Color account for only 4 percent of C-suite leaders, with little change over the last three years.

The number of WOC leaving (and being forced out) of workforces today, and the trauma and burnout they are facing, is a national crisis. We need to listen to our sisters of color and we need to support them. The more we learn from them, the more we can improve.

This research and the work that nFormation is doing perfectly align with the mission of the BJKLI. We wanted and needed to hear directly from WOC to unearth their real life experiences, and to compel people to act, change, and lead.

Committing to improving workplaces and cultures for WOC shouldn’t limit or erase white people. It should bring us together and make us stronger. By standing together, we can have a future that’s better than anything ever imagined, because we’re painting it with all the colors of the palette.

Thank you to each survey respondent and salon attendee, and to the team of women who conducted and produced this research. Your honesty, genius, and drive are inspirational. Thank you also to Salesforce and Deborah Slaner Larkin who supported this work. You are forever “stepping up”.

Let’s change the world – things can only get better by working together. Let’s go for it.

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It's Time to Get Real

Be Real: There's No Such Thing as "Business as Usual" Anymore

An epic global plague, a massive workforce "peace out," and a worldwide reckoning with race have revealed that current corporate structures aren't living up to evolving expectations.

On every level—customers, business partners, employees, and leaders—people are [demanding](#)¹ change. And rightfully so. No, not the quiet kind that happens behind closed doors and over the course of several decades. We want transparent conversations and actions that can be implemented now.

As WOC, we know what it feels like to not have our expectations met. For decades (well—centuries, since we're being real here), our voices and our contributions have been ignored in the workplace.

And while there is no question that has harmed us, it's forced us to rethink how, where, and why we work. It means that thousands of us have left or are planning to leave corporate America. Recent research from nFormation and *FairyGodBoss* revealed that 1 in 3 WOC are considering leaving their jobs.² Between 2014 to 2019, firms owned by WOC grew an astounding 43%.³

And the stark reality is, on top of losing us, you are going to lose us in a time when you need us more than ever. According to the latest United States Census [data](#)⁴, the US is becoming more diverse at faster rates than once projected.

Simply put: You need our leadership.



*"It's not about getting a seat at the table when the table is all messed up for everyone. It's about how we reimagine the systems, the politics, and culture."*⁵

– Ai-jen Poo, Director, Domestic Workers Alliance

If Things Don't Change, We'll Continue to Leave

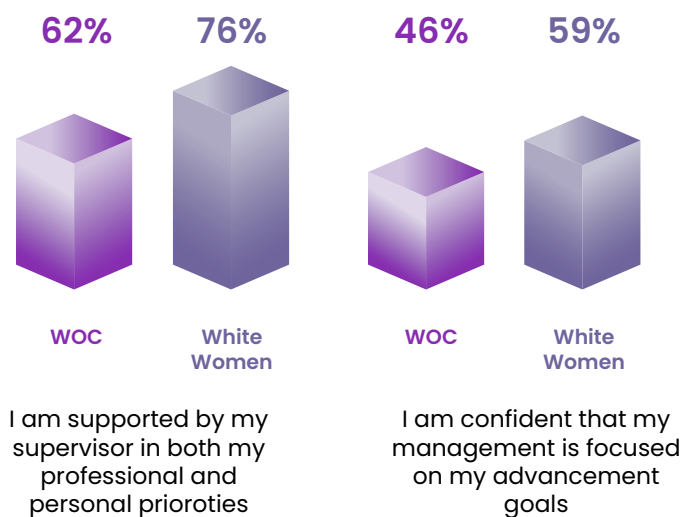
Our research proves what we are hearing and seeing anecdotally: WOC have had enough. Lack of support at the manager and company levels has us fed up and choosing alternatives to the traditional (or current) workplace.

WOC are

18%

less likely to feel supported by our supervisors than white women.

% agree with statement



The result? More of us will leave and that means YOU will suffer. The good news is we conducted this research with YOU in mind. We want corporate America—and ALL workplaces—to hear our truths and join us in paving the way for a workplace in which all employees can thrive. Here's the good news...

You've already got your competitive edge: It's us.

A portrait of a young woman with curly hair, overlaid with a purple gradient and the text "Women of Color Trailblazers" repeated in a grid pattern.

Stop Looking for Unicorns: We're Here and We're Real

[illegible]

We're Truth-Tellers

Many employers are looking for innovative thinkers, multitaskers, problem solvers, and rock star managers—triple points for the employees who can do it all. These so-called workplace unicorns really do exist; they're us, the WOC in your organizations.

This moment we are in requires new voices. It requires bravery from people who can talk about what is broken in the larger system.

We know what the challenges are. You need to see us and you need to hear us. But if you are going to ask us to help you, certain things need to change.

68%

are willing to speak truth even in uncomfortable situations, so when you're designing new initiatives or launching new programs, WOC will tell the emperor if he has no clothes.

"WOC would bring such a fresh perspective to 'how' work gets done and goals are accomplished that companies would see innovation and profits skyrocket beyond their belief. I also think that overall individual and collective well-being would increase exponentially."

– Latina



"Women of Color are amazing. Don't stand by and watch our talent be wasted, or worse, contribute to the problems many of us face in corporate structures."

– Dr. Ella Bell, Tuck School of Business, Dartmouth College

Our Lived Experiences Make Us Natural Leaders

Because of our experiences as outsiders and immigrants, WOC have developed unique skills that enable us to adapt, shift, and innovate.

76% of WOC agree that we bring unique skills and strengths to the workplace.

It takes serious guts to be a WOC and toss your hat in the ring for a job that no other WOC has ever held. We are usually the first, one of a few, or the only person to ever look like us to occupy leadership roles. You may take it for granted, but when all of your predecessors look like you, your instincts tell you that you can do the job too. Women of Color don't get these validating messages. And yet we rise to the occasion time and time again.



"I had to move in spaces that are very different. This has really been helpful in the workplace because I can communicate or understand a lot of the talent in a way that I don't think that my white peers can."
– Black Woman

Think about being the first in your family to make a start in a new country, go to college, or work in the corporate world. As WOC, we have had to overcome so much to even be in the running.

Women of Color Are Inherently Culturally Competent

Our stories are rich, and the richness only adds to your company's story. Single parents and other caretakers are often experts at multitasking, time management, team building, and bringing empathy to their work. Many of our immigrant sisters speak multiple languages and are translators of culture. These skills are usually dismissed during the hiring and advancement review processes. Being culturally competent is an important element in recognizing employees' humanity; a trait that's been sorely lacking in corporate leadership.

Can you empathize with people who sacrificed to come to the US, say you've overcome discrimination to get into a school and earn your degree, work in a language that is not your mother tongue, and work for a company that doesn't value all of who you are? If you can't, take some time to appreciate those of us who can.

Consider the diversity of our survey respondents:

	Asian	Black	Latina
Parents have a college degree	66%	56%	50%
Born outside of the US	50%	13%	23%
Have a postgrad degree	47%	47%	34%
LGBTQ+	6%	8%	12%

We Are THE Underutilized Resource

We know we have the skills, the experience, and the leadership you need, but we remain an underutilized resource.

WOC are

15%

less likely than white women to agree that our supervisors respect our opinions.

WOC are

19%

less likely than white women to feel our skills are valued and leveraged.

% agree with statement



"The 'future' could have begun yesterday, but no one bothers to even engage with us, let alone listen to us."

– Black Woman

Ours Is the Leadership You Need TODAY (and Beyond)

We all know that old models of leadership are holding companies back. What used to work at work no longer does. Top-down, authoritarian, “stale, male, pale” leadership is so last century.

20th Century Leadership

Authoritarian, Secretive
“**My way** or the highway”
Inflexible, **Rigid**
Discomfort with the **Unknown**
Guarded
Scarcity Mindset
Driven by **Profits**
“Get it done **fast**”
“**Stale, Pale, Male**”
Micromanager; in the Weeds
Personal Success

21st Century Leadership

Authoritative, Transparent
“**Tell me more**”
Collaborative, **Agile**
Comfort with **Ambiguity**
Vulnerable
Abundance Mindset
Driven by **Purpose**
“Get it done **right**”
Belief in **Advocacy, Diversity**
Visionary; Delegates
Team Success



“My identity is not my obstacle. My identity is my super power.”⁶

– America Ferrera, Activist & Actress

Our Leadership Is Modern Leadership

Modern leaders must evolve to meet the realities of today. And here's the good news: Pick a leadership skill—any skill—and WOC have it. From humility, to agility, to empathy, we have what you need right now.

We are confident:

83% of us are confident in our leadership abilities.

We are empathetic and humble:

87% of us see ourselves as empathetic. **and** **78%** of us consider ourselves to be humble.

We're effective decision-makers:

85% of us bring good judgment to the workplace, allowing us to make clear-headed decisions that help move the business forward.

We're innovators:

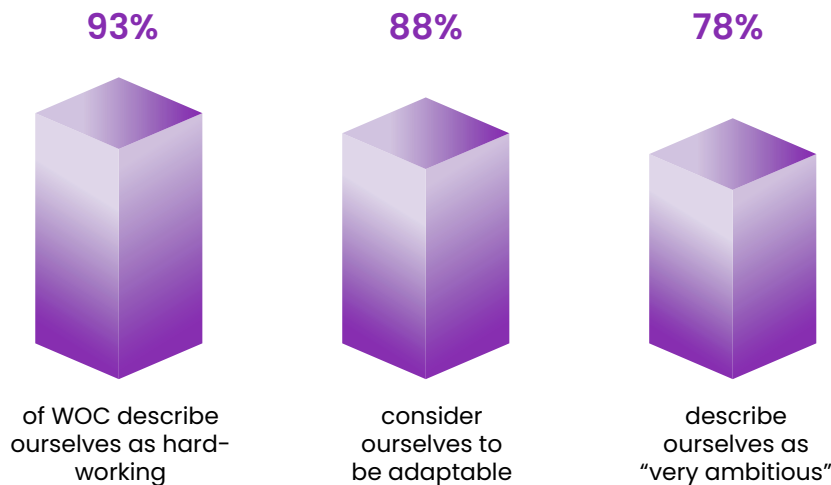
85% of us are resilient; which means we are willing to try, fail, iterate, and learn—key skills for true innovation.



"From the moment we set foot in this country, we have been adapting our lives in two different worlds; innovating how we solve the many problems we face, building human networks to feel connected, and finding new ways to retain our native culture and traditions for our children."

– Latina

And we have the drive, ambition, and inner resources to succeed.



When we asked what the workplace would look like if more WOC were in charge, here's what some of our respondents had to say:

"Happier, more connected employees."

– Latina

"An expansion of care and services that benefit ALL employees."

– Black Woman

"A deeper understanding of how to attract and retain customers."

– Asian Woman

Imagine the modernization we could bring if our voices were heard and our talents, skills, and abilities were actually utilized to their fullest potential.

We want to lead and we are ready...but are YOU ready to do things differently?

Companies: Your Systems Don't Work; Your Policies Are Lacking

[illegible]

Stop Lying to Us (and to Yourselfes). This Is No Meritocracy.

The reality is we are not benefitting from your current systems and policies. Why? Because your systems weren't designed for the future and, therefore, never considered or incorporated us. An Asian woman we surveyed said it best: "Today's systems were designed for yesterday's men...white men with stay-at-home wives. But what about the rest of us?"

The days of "Leave It to Beaver" are long gone, folks. It's time to reassess how your systems function, who they're benefitting, and what that means for the talent you need. We asked WOC what is "holding you back." We heard (again and again)...

Your systems maintain the status quo and do not serve our interests.

"Patriarchy"

**"Toxic
Capitalism"**

**"The
Intersection
of Racism
and Sexism"**



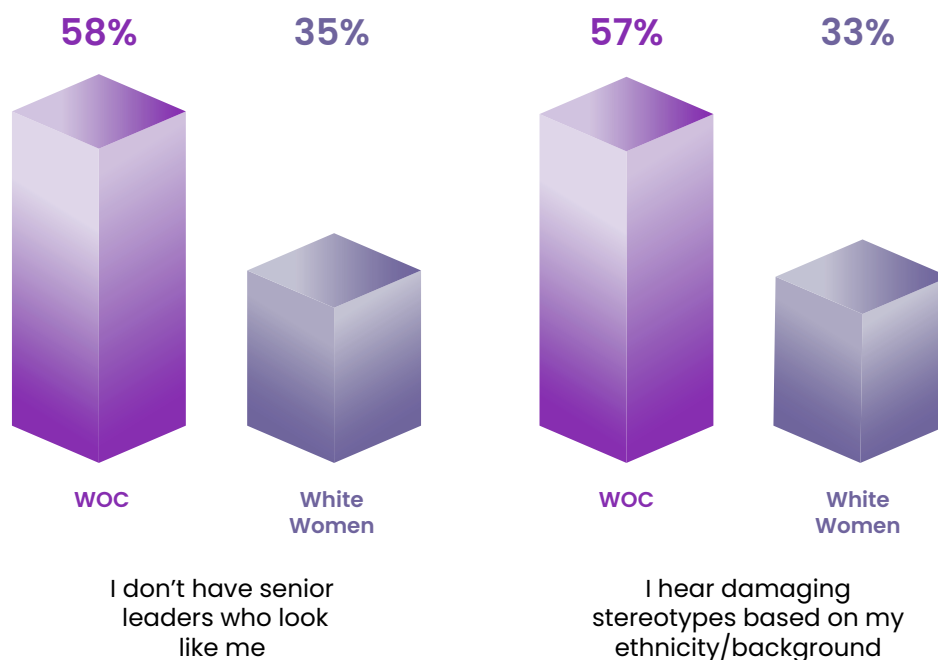
"The more I work to be successful, the more I need to work."⁷

– Shonda Rhimes, Award-winning TV Writer & Producer

The System Isn't Unbiased or Blind

And, as a result, it's more challenging for us.

% agree this has impacted their career



We are dealing with microaggressions and implicit (sometimes even explicit) bias everyday.



We Can't Live Up to Our Full Potential

At every level, we are struggling relative to our white peers.

Pay

We are **25%** less likely to say we are rewarded fairly compared to white women.

Promotions

More than half of us are not satisfied with our rate of advancement (**+61%** compared to white women).

Development

We are **20%** less likely to say "I have the resources needed to advance my career".

Hiring and Advancement

72% of us agree companies must expand their criteria for how people are hired and advanced so more diverse candidates are considered.

92% of us agree that companies must establish specific goals for hiring and promoting WOC into influential positions.

"We don't even get diverse candidates despite the heat that is on diverse talent. We've got multiple recruiters, but if I'm honest and I look at the recruiters, I don't think that they look very diverse themselves."

– Asian Woman



"What we want from our leaders is for someone to step up and say [that this] will never happen again."⁸

– Anita Hill, Lawyer, Scholar, Author

Stop Training Us; Start Investing in Us

We want you to do more than just train us. We want you to invest in us as current and future leaders. Investing in us doesn't create an opportunity for us to take our newly-honed talents and run to the nearest competitor. It enables us to create greater impact for **YOU**.

72%

of us want our companies to provide us with external coaching to help us navigate our careers.

"Companies try to do a good job with the talent acquisition and recruiting, but they don't do anything when it comes to retaining employees."

– Asian Woman

"I've received very little in terms of funding for self-improvement. That hasn't stopped me."

– Asian Woman

"Give us professional development opportunities, rich development opportunities. Not some random two-day conference."

– Black Woman

There's Only One "Broke-Ass Chair" at the Table

54%

of WOC agree that women undermine each other at work.

Why does this happen? Why are we still listening to and even perpetuating overt and indirect messages that suggest there is only one seat at the table for WOC? The designation of "a seat" makes it feel more like charity than an actual reward for dedication, hard work, and know-how.

"Women of Color are competing with other Women of Color for a seat at the table and there's only one broke-ass chair. And that's the problem."

– Black Woman

"It's systemic. There's often this belief that there's only room for one of us at the table. And it often leads to environments that are even more toxic when you have a group of diverse women coming together at a workplace."

– Latina



"We want to change the world, but we also want to change culture...a lot of best practices come from best mistakes."⁹

– Natalia Oberti Noguera, Founder & CEO, Pipeline Angels

Zero-Sum Thinking Hurts Us All

Many of us have been taught that a gain for one is a loss for another; that there is a finite amount and if someone has more, the other has less. This is the definition of zero-sum thinking.¹⁰ Research¹¹ has shown that men, particularly those working in hyper-masculine industries (think: high tech or finance), are more prone to zero-sum thinking when it comes to gender equity. But women struggle with this as well.

If there are limited chairs at the table, it can breed a scarcity mindset—the belief that there is not enough to go around. We need to move beyond the idea that gains for some come at a loss for others.

“If you’re in a system with the myth of capitalism and the myth of scarcity and all of this stuff, it’s almost inevitable that you’re going to stab first, which is why we have to change the structure.”

– Asian Woman

The point of view that suggests the pie is static and we are just redistributing power is passé. It is time to realize we inherited a system we **CAN** change. If we want it to change, we have to be that change.

We can make more seats at the table. Our success doesn’t have to come at the cost of others.

“If we start changing our own belief system and our values to say, ‘let’s help each other out because the world is harsh to us out there,’ I believe there’s power in that.”

– Asian Woman

Women of Color are trailblazers

A portrait of a woman with dark hair pulled back, looking slightly to the side. The image has a purple tint. Overlaid on the image is the text "Women of Color are trailblazers" repeated in a light purple, outlined font, arranged in a grid pattern. The woman is wearing a light-colored collared shirt under a dark jacket.

You Don't Have Enough D, E, or I

A woman in a dark suit and light-colored striped shirt is holding a white folder. The folder has the word "heartline" printed on it in a dark, sans-serif font. The entire image is covered with a semi-transparent purple gradient. Overlaid on this gradient, the phrase "Women of Color are trailblazers" is repeated nine times in a white, outlined, sans-serif font, stacked vertically from top to bottom.

Believe Us, Pay Us, and See Value In Our Perspectives

You've been stumbling all over yourselves to prove your commitment to DE&I. Nice effort, but most of the WOC we talked to think companies are failing when it comes to DE&I.

96% of us agree that it's important for companies to establish HONEST and TRUE commitments to DE&I.

We're tired of your performative efforts saying all the "right" things, but not following it up with real integrated solutions (translation: action). It must have an impact on your people, your processes, and all your business activities.

"Take all of this seriously and stop just saying the words, but not living the values."

– Asian Woman

"This is a business problem; it's a human resources issue. We innovate around sales and new product development. Let's innovate around diversity and inclusion."

– Black Woman



"Equity lacks ambition."

– Nathalie Molina Niño, Managing Director, Known Holdings & Author of *Leapfrog*

Believing *in* us and simply believing us are two different things. Ask questions, learn about your own biases, and then engage in dialogues (not directives).

82% of us said it was critical to have white colleagues get informed about their own biases and prejudices so, together, a true dialogue about change can happen.

When WOC report workplace abuses, we're more likely to be dismissed than our white counterparts.



"Most company leaders at all levels have very low racial literacy or literacy about gender as well."

– Latina

97% of us agree companies must establish better processes to investigate racism and discrimination at work.

Hire us and pay us accordingly.

Adding a Black or Brown face to the C-suite, limiting their authority, and giving them a minuscule budget (if any at all) doesn't promote diversity, equity, or inclusion. In fact, it actually hurts your cause.

How?

Because those DE&I experts don't have the support and resources needed to make a real impact. Don't ask us to help improve processes, policies, and systems, while expecting us to maintain our regular workloads without additional compensation.

Evolve Your DE&I so It Actually Works

92%

of us agree it's important to "add diversity and inclusion metrics to the performance standards for executives."

Take a hard look at the old ways of doing things. Now, imagine something new and take some meaningful action.

Old Way	New Way
Leaders consider DE&I as "nice to have" or, worse, a distraction to business success	Leaders see DE&I as integral to successful business outcomes
CDOs with no budget; limited authority; and isolated	Empowers CDOs reporting directly into the CEO working in partnership with the key functions across the company
DE&I as add-on to day job	Compensates and rewards DE&I efforts because they are essential to company success
DE&I as an add-on to culture	Centers company culture and values around DE&I
Not embedded	Embeds in governance and policy
Does not have metrics for DE&I goals and impact	Uses data driven DE&I insights to shape business initiatives, programs, and policies

Pro Tip: When meaningful and transparent changes come from senior executives, it sets the tone for the rest of the organization.



"Without [courageous, uncomfortable conversations] you basically have people who are not able to feel included, or a sense of belonging."¹²

– Vernā Myers, VP, Inclusion Strategy, Netflix



It's Time to Humanize Work

It's Time to Change the Way We Work

Corporate structures, profits and losses, mergers and acquisitions, recruiting and advancement. They're all important. People are more important.

But we're burned out. And not just WOC.

Women of all ethnicities are experiencing burnout. According to the 2021 McKinsey [report](#), women are experiencing exhaustion, chronic stress, and burnout at higher rates than men. And during the pandemic, women took on more work and more risk—without recognition or reward. No wonder women are exhausted, fed up, and in many cases saying, "Enough is enough."

"With more Women of Color in charge, there would be companies that care about the whole person and employee experience."

– Black Woman

"We could step away from the 'workaholic culture' that is valued for advancement."

– Asian Woman

"I tried to stay and make it work. But after two years, I knew it wasn't going to get better for me at my company and I had to exit. I wish I had left earlier but I thought I had to stay."

– Black Woman

We're Traumatized

Women of Color aren't just burned out. Women of Color have experienced trauma—both from the workplace and society at large. It's baked into our stress levels and into every interaction we have at work and in the world.

When we carry the weight of racism, microaggressions, ignorance, and hatred, our productivity is diminished and our well-being is at high risk. That hurts us AND hurts your business.

97%

of us agree that it's important to structure formally-established flexible work hours so we can care for our families and commit to our work.

95%

agree it is vital to create safe spaces where WOC can discuss our unique challenges and find solutions.

69%

agree that providing more access to counselling, mental health and well-being resources would be helpful.

Today's workplaces are hurting us in ways that aren't impacting white women or white men. If you want us to thrive—and trust us, you do—then the first step is to humanize work. Address racism, take our feedback seriously, work on your company cultures, and put money and emphasis on ways to help us work better.



"Workplace abuse is just as insidious as any other form of abuse."¹³

– Minda Harts, Speaker & Author of *Right Within* and *The Memo*



70% of us agree we have to prove ourselves over and over
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"... It's a lack of humanity at work that feeds into folks not feeling esteemed."

– Black Woman

"Every time we show up, there's that little questioning of who we are. Our capabilities. Sometimes it can be really challenging."

– Latina

Performance Can No Longer Trump Character

You know “that guy”— the sales leader, the creative head, the genius engineer—who rubs everyone the wrong way and usually says something that makes you cringe at best (and check in with legal, at worst)?

Get Rid of the Toxic Rock Stars

“Our **leaders coddle the toxic rock stars** and leave the rest of us to suffer the consequences.” – Asian Woman

“So many times, the marginalized person who’s like, ‘**hey, this person is crazy, they’re racist or sexist,**’ gets dismissed as the one lone wolf or just being difficult.” – Black Woman

“**My company ignored the bad behavior** of a big producer. I got labelled ‘noisy,’ even though he had a history of this on his HR record. **I left**—good riddance!” – Asian Woman

Company leaders tolerate these folks because the “toxic rock star” puts up the numbers needed. But at what cost to the company and its culture?

96%

of us agree that it is important to “create better ways for diverse groups to provide feedback to senior leaders and HR leaders,” especially when it comes to dealing with toxic rock stars and toxic work cultures.

Get rid of “that guy.” They’re a cancer to the entire organization and limit the overall productivity of the whole. Leaving them in positions of power speaks volumes about what you really care about: profits over people. Your willingness to keep them—is one of the reasons we’ve been leaving.

**White Women: Join the
Work Revolution**

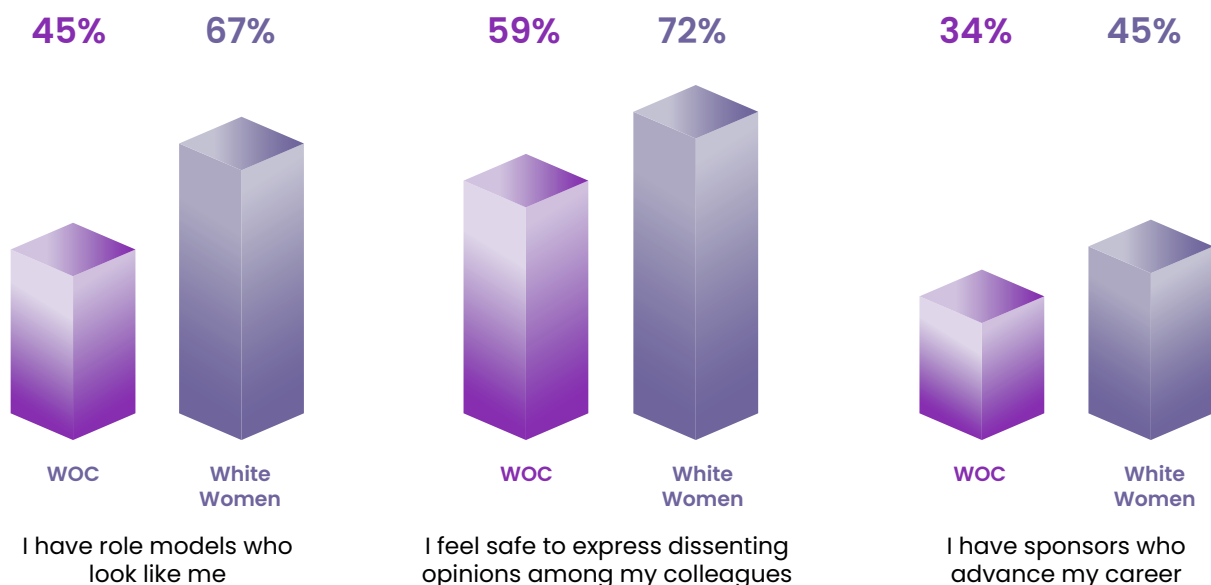
Recognize Your Privilege. You Have More Than You Realize.

Authentic allyship requires humility and courage. It requires you to be vulnerable and understand there are things you don't know about our lived experiences.

Almost half **(47%)** of us agree that “white women make me feel inferior/invisible/like I do not matter” in the workplace.

In just about every metric, white women told us they are doing better than we feel, ourselves, to be doing.

% agree with this statement



85%

of us said it was important for white colleagues to “stop assuming what we need and ask us directly.”

Don't HOARD, SHARE Your Privilege

"If you aren't one, and dislike the trope, why not work to dismantle the attitudes that are 'Karen-ish' instead of trying to silence the voices that call out the toxic behaviors?"

– Black Woman

Our research revealed a VERY concerning gap between what white women SAY they want to do, and what we experience.

Only **29%** of white women are currently sharing insights about company culture, individual personalities, or other tips that may be helpful.

Only **9%** of white women are currently sponsoring a WOC.

Even though...**79%** of white women say they are committed to referring a WOC for a job opportunity and **74%** of them claim they are willing to publicly give us credit for our work and contributions.

The good news is... **93%** of WOC and **91%** of white women agree it is essential to enhance overall collaboration and alignment between WOC and white women.



"We white women need to get over our shame of not knowing what we don't know and start listening and learning. When you've not shown up as an upstander, sit in the discomfort, move through it, learn from it, then act. It's the only way forward from here."

– Kim Scott, Author of *Radical Candor*, *Just Work*,
& Co-founder of Just Work Together

Your Work as White Women

Build a true partnership. Here are some tactical things you can do right now.

Give us meaningful feedback:

80%

of us agree we need allies to provide timely, direct, and actionable feedback.

Amplify our voices:

68%

of us agree it is helpful for allies to amplify the voices of WOC even when we are not in the room.

“Echo/amplify what other Women of Color say in meetings. Send division-wide emails to ensure others are aware of the accomplishments of Women of Color.”

– Black Woman

“What can they learn from us, as well as what we can learn from them? It needs to be much more reciprocal, in terms of going into a relationship with equal power.”

– Latina

“If we can figure out how to form as a collective, then we have a louder voice. And guess what, when you have a louder voice, you can disrupt things.”

– Asian Woman

[illegible][illegible]

But, the World Views Us as a Monolith

Even the term “Women of Color” largely ignores the myriad cultural nuances within each of the key three ethnic groups we studied. For example:

Latina Women in the US workforce represent third-generation citizens, DREAMers, and recently naturalized immigrants. We’re from Mexico, Brazil, Nicaragua, Belize, and beyond—33 countries in all. And we’re also from right here. You may think we’re all the same, but you’d be wrong.

Black Women aren’t all from “the ‘hood.” We graduated from HBCUs, the Ivy League, community colleges, and state universities. We’re from the wealthiest counties in the country and, yes, some of us grew up in impoverished urban or rural areas and have gone on to hone invaluable skills. It may surprise some people to learn that not all of us are US-born.

Asian Women are born into families of doctors, engineers, and scientists. Yet, some of our parents owned laundromats and restaurants. We’re fifth-generation Americans or have emigrated from Bangladesh and India and Pakistan; China and Japan and Taiwan. And we’re not anyone’s “model minority.”

“I’ve had a recent boss who said to me, when I asked why I was hired, ‘Well, I just thought that you’d be really nice and get along with everybody.’ But it was said in a way that somehow implied I wouldn’t disturb the status quo.”

– Asian Women



Additionally, our survey respondents brought intersectional experiences as mothers, members of LGBTQ+ communities, first-generation college students, recent immigrants, and more. We noticed some interesting differences by group that we wanted to share:

As a result of feedback and stereotypes like the “model minority” myth, Asian women are **13%** less likely than other WOC to feel they are seen as a leader by their colleagues and management.

Black women are **28%** less likely to have role models who look like them compared to other WOC and **17%** more likely to have damaging stereotypes based on their ethnicity and background and yet despite this they are **44%** more likely to mentor other WOC compared to Asian Women and Latinas.

Latinas are **32%** more likely to report feeling competitive with other women, however, they are also most likely to describe themselves as “brave” and most willing to speak the truth even in uncomfortable situations.

“I publicly support BIPOC on LinkedIn as an ally; I have confronted my workplace on 14 years of racism (without giving up my power, and frankly kicking their ass); I vulnerably share stories with WOC so they can avoid my mistakes.”

– Black Woman



“This is our moment to step into our legacy and our leadership, but we must do it together as WOC.”

– Deepa Purushothaman &
Rha Goddess, Co-founders of nFormation

Women of Color are trailblazers
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 Women of Color are trailblazers

**WOC: Let's Do More
 for Each Other**

We Want to Fully Support Each Other, But...

95% of WOC agree that enhancing overall collaboration among WOC in addressing common problems and challenges is important.

And we dream of being able to help each other to rise. We're change agents for each other.

We said it's time to get real. And that includes getting real with ourselves. We recognize that we can do more for each other. It's time to show up for other WOC as we change how work gets done. And to let go of insecurities and push through the barriers that block us.

But because we face systems that weren't designed for us, we operate in workplaces that don't see, hear, or value us, and because of trauma, we aren't doing as much as we would like to support each other. Let's change that.

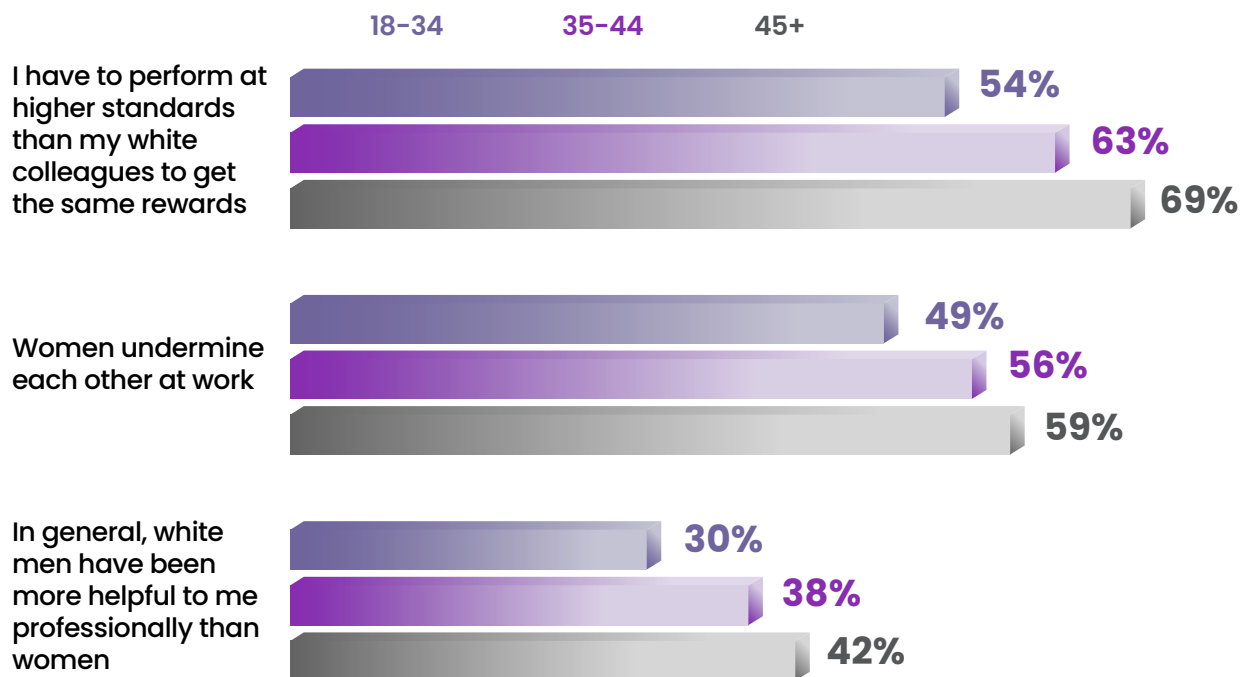
% WOC willing to do these to support other WOC



We Have Hope for the Next Generation

Here's the bright news in all of the research: Younger WOC aren't facing all the same challenges as those of us who are more seasoned and experienced. They don't feel forced to perform to higher standards. They are less likely to feel undermined by other women and more likely to support each other.

% agreement among WOC by Age



Those of us in the 18-34 age range are significantly more likely to actively work to address racial bias and microaggressions than older WOC.

We're also significantly more likely to share our salary history with other WOC.

This is all good news. But we wonder... is this because our younger colleagues haven't been in the workforce long enough to face the same challenges or are things truly changing? No matter the answer, we are determined to make change for all.



Oh, What a Beautiful World

Thriving People. Profitable Companies. Purpose Aligned.

We asked every woman we surveyed how the workplace would be different if it centered on WOC.

"Policies and practices would be more holistic and companies would see greater financial advancement because of a more diverse approach to problem-solving, revenue generation, and cost management."

– Asian Woman

"Companies would be more successful (profitable) because they'd have a happier and more engaged workforce. They'd have lower turnover because the employees would be more loyal to a place that respects them and treats them with equity and fairness."

– Black Woman

"WOC would bring such a fresh perspective to 'how' work gets done and goals are accomplished that companies would see innovation and profits skyrocket beyond their belief. I also think that overall individual and collective well-being would increase exponentially."

– Asian Woman



"We will not be turned around or interrupted by intimidation, because we know our inaction and inertia will be the inheritance of the next generation."¹⁴

– Amanda Gorman, Poet

Many said, "More reflective of reality."

**Black
Women
said...**

Liberated
Innovative
Access
Creative
Prosperous

**Asian
Women
said...**

Humane
Compassionate
Seen/Heard
Thoughtful
Empowering

**Latinas
said...**

Safe
Inclusive
Authentic
Anti-racist
Intentional space

**White
women
said...**

Dynamic
Innovative
Joyful
Brighter
Amplified

Listen. Learn. Lead.

Let's not just aim for equity. The system is broken. We want better than equity in a broken system. We want a system that works for all people, considers them and treats them as human beings, and worries about profit, people, and the planet.

If you're a company leader, maybe you didn't create the systems that are driving the workforce away, but it is your responsibility to seize this opportunity to disrupt the status quo and make work—work for us all.

We need to work together in order to grow and advance business cultures. For white people, racism and discrimination are like the comma of a sentence: You can pause and consider it, but move on.

For us, it's a period. We don't have the luxury to move on from it when we'd like.

If you're a white ally who's ready to become a Co-Conspirator, we're talking to you. You probably already consider yourself to be an ally, and while that's pretty awesome, we're seeking Co-Conspirators.

Ally: someone who makes the commitment and effort to recognize their privilege (based on gender, class, race, sexual identity, etc.) and works in solidarity with oppressed groups in the struggle for justice.¹⁵

Co-Conspirator: someone who ups the ante by taking direct action against racism and bias, regardless of the personal or professional consequences they may face.

Co-Conspirators take it to the next level to focus on action and not just sentiments or expressions of solidarity; they're change makers, and we're hoping you're one, too. You can help deconstruct existing systems and replace them with new innovations that change your entire industry.

Do it for yourselves. Do it for us. Do it for the world.

10 SOLUTIONS FOR COMPANIES: IT'S NOT ROCKET SCIENCE

1. We're Your Innovators

In a time when we are all looking for new solutions, look to us for innovation. We are an underused resource with a voice waiting to be heard. We have ideas on topics beyond just DE&I. Put us on your product development teams, your financial strategy team, engage us with clients, and listen to our lived experience as you develop new products and new segments. We can help you grow and transform your business.

2. The Pipeline Is Not the Problem; Value Our Lived Experiences

Don't tell us there is a pipeline issue and you can't find talent. Are your recruiters diverse? Do you have people who look like us on your interview teams? Are your job descriptions inclusive? Do your interview questions delve into the value we bring from our lived experiences? Try, "What struggles have you had to overcome to get to this seat?" Or, "What other roles do you take on outside of work that speak to your leadership or team building skills?" Ask if we've been the first, one of a few, or the only to occupy a role.

3. Don't Just "Believe" in Pay Equity, Do the Work

Pay equity is not a one and done process; it's a long game. Follow the lead of Salesforce CEO, Marc Benioff. He did the analysis and went on a three year journey to get pay equity right. If you're stumped on how to get started, check out pay equity solutions that provide 3rd party verification and offer a fair pay certification, which makes **YOU** an employer **WE** want to work for.

4. Tell Us the Truth

We want unbiased and unvarnished, but constructive feedback. Sadly, most managers don't know how to give feedback and are [afraid to give it to us as Women of Color](#).¹⁶ Start by training them on how to give actionable, direct, and timely feedback so we can get what we need to advance. And then, commit to delivering regular performance reviews. Effective, consistent feedback coupled with transparent pathways to promotion are rocket fuel for our success.

5. Dialogues, Not Directives

Your current policies don't work for us because they weren't created with us in mind. But, you don't have to go it alone as you work to create a truly inclusive workplace. As you shift, engage with us instead of attempting to think for us. What does that look like? Make sure we are part of important discussions like benefits reviews. Conduct meaningful employee surveys and engage with us to learn what is working and what isn't. If you're a company leader, interact with your diverse employees who will tell you what you need to hear, not what you want to hear. Listen. Don't penalize the messenger. Take action.

10 SOLUTIONS FOR COMPANIES: IT'S NOT ROCKET SCIENCE

6. Get Rid of Toxic Rock Stars

We shouldn't have to say this (it's so obvious), but recognize what "that guy" is doing to your culture. By rewarding them for their ability to deliver to the bottom line at the expense of the well-being of those around them, you are sending us a message: profits matter over people. If the word on the street is that you'd rather keep the toxic rock star and lose us, we're not going to work for you. Full stop.

7. Focus on Mental Health and Well Being

You read it before: We're not only dealing with burnout, we're struggling with trauma. And the solutions you are providing often don't work for us. We need safe spaces: ERGs, Slack channels, and external solutions like nFormation that allow us to connect and talk to one another. We need meaningful mental health support including diverse counselors who are trained in racial trauma, and support for paid leave as necessary. We need companies and colleagues who are willing to engage in uncomfortable conversations, who are humble and curious, and who are committed to change.

8. Metrics Matter, Stick to Them

You want to attract and retain diverse talent? Establish metrics and make them public. And be sure your stats are intersectional. It's great if women make up a significant percentage of your senior leadership, but if they are all white women, you're limiting your innovation and not setting yourself up for success in the talent wars. Having trouble getting traction on creating diverse, inclusive cultures? Then follow the lead of [trailblazing](#) companies and tie executive pay to your diversity metrics.¹⁷ When money talks, leaders listen.

9. Stop Forcing Us to Do Unpaid Labor: Invest in AND Value DE&I

First, treat DE&I like the business imperative it is. Embed it into every aspect of your culture from recruiting to hiring, to performance to promotions. Get that right and the rest will follow. Second, consider the active work of DE&I as part of leadership development. Having cultural competency should be an essential leadership skill. Reward and promote those who have it. And while you do that, pay us fairly and equitably when we perform managerial, manual, or emotional labor for you. Take the lead of savvy companies by compensating employees who are leading DE&I initiatives.

10. We Care About Profits, People, and Purpose. You Should Too.

Business is changing and we want to focus on people, profits and purpose in all ways. We want to do work that matters to us, drives business results, and has impact, but in structures that don't cause us—or the world at large—harm. Let's work together to rethink scarcity, limited seats at the table, and the zero-sum game. Our world needs all of our voices to address the business and societal challenges in front of us.

10 SOLUTIONS FOR CO-CONSPIRATORS: WE CAN DO MORE—TOGETHER

1. Recognize Your Privilege

White colleagues, it's past time to get curious and understand that, while you may have challenges, you also have privileges that WOC don't have. Google whatever question you have. Or ask us. Then work with us to dismantle racist and sexist systems that truly don't benefit any of us.

2. Get Informed About Your Own Biases

Let's get real: we all have biases. They're hard-wired into our brains, but how we handle them makes all of the difference. As you're getting informed about your privilege, it's also critical you learn about your biases and prejudices. Complete nFormation's sister program, [White Awakening](#).¹⁸ Once you do the work, then we can truly become Co-Conspirators for change.

3. This Work Is Hard—You Need to Release the Shame

We get it. You don't know what you don't know. And learning new things can be intimidating, overwhelming, and—in cases of racial disparity—shameful. It's time to get beyond the shame so we can work together. Meet with other Co-Conspirators who are committed to increasing their cultural competency and becoming part of the solution.

4. Recognize the Systems That Hold Us ALL Back

The workplace structure, which was built for white men with stay-at-home wives, hurts us all. It means women are trying to fit into a model that wasn't designed with us in mind. But it presents WOC with more challenges and obstacles. We have to not only deal with gender bias, but racial bias as well. Recognize this, don't add to it, and join us in calling out inequities in the moment. If you see something, say something; whether you witness us being talked over in meetings, having our ideas stolen, or being called "angry" or "feisty." We all need to lean in to correct problems. This is your work, too.

5. Don't Assume You Know What We Need—Just Ask

It's not our responsibility to train you, but at the same time, it is ok to ask us what we think. Do your homework and then if you still have questions, ask. We welcome true allies who bring their curiosity and willingness to learn.

10 SOLUTIONS FOR CO-CONSPIRATORS: WE CAN DO MORE—TOGETHER

6. Share Your Knowledge

There are the stated ways things are done, and there are also hidden truths in every workplace. Women of Color are often excluded (whether intentionally or not) from those hidden truths and the informal networks that supply them, be it insight into how promotions work, the truth about salary negotiations, or something as simple—and yet, important—as who has the real power at the organization. If you have insights, we need to know.

7. Share Your Privilege: Find Us and Hire Us

[Data](#) shows that most people tend to live near and spend time with people who look and think like them. In fact, 40% of white Americans do not have a friend of a different race. It takes intention to expand your network. Use social media and other creative networking resources to expand who you know and build your teams. Find us, we exist. Then, hire us. That's how sharing privilege works.

8. Share Your Privilege: Mentor Us

You know this already: Mentorship is not a one-way street. When you mentor us, you get insight into our world which helps build your cultural competency. This helps your career and helps ours. And, if your company doesn't have a formal mentorship program (and metrics to support it), work with us to create one. We'll all be better off.

9. Share Your Privilege: Sponsor Us

And you know this too: [Sponsorship¹⁹ means using your social capital](#) to advance another person. It means amplifying our accomplishments, connecting us with opportunities, and championing us when we aren't sitting at the table. When you sponsor us, you're seen as a modern leader with an inclusive mindset, and a diverse network. Sure, it means sharing your social capital, but that's what sharing privilege is all about.

10. Let's Make Change Together

Working together requires trust and opportunities for us to get to know each other on a deeper level. That can't always happen in conference rooms or through Zoom squares. We may have more in common than we all realize, but we have to see the system for what it is, have the hard conversations, get to know one another, and then chart a path forward.

10 SOLUTIONS FOR WOC: LET'S USE THIS MOMENT

1. Prioritize Your Health and Wellbeing!

We've been conditioned to consider everyone else but ourselves.

2. Redefine Success on Your Terms

So many of us have been handed a definition for success, but you need to make your own definition so it works for you.

3. Invest in Your Own Development and Growth

As you consider your vision for advancement, determine which investments are vital to achieving your aspirations.

4. Find Your Authentic Voice

The permission for our full self-expression begins with us. Finding and honoring your authentic voice is vital for thriving.

5. Stand for Your Value and Your Values

Stand your ground when we get asked to act in ways that betray our sense of dignity and self respect.

6. Cultivate Authentic Community

We must cultivate community in order to nourish and sustain ourselves when the going gets rough.

7. Know When to Get Out

Not all cultures are WOC friendly and once you know you are in the wrong place it is ok to give yourself permission to exit.

8. Build Meaningful Cross-Cultural Relationships

Just as we encourage our Co-Conspirators to expand their networks, it is imperative that we do the same. Not only with white men and women, but also with each other.

9. Work in Ways That Make the Pie Bigger

Learning how to work in ways that enable more of us to shine means the potential for greater results and even more success for us all.

10. Sponsor/Mentor/Employ Your Sisters

Being intentional about this commitment enables us to transform the challenges that come with being a first, one of a few, or the only.



The Future Is All of Us

Methodology

The research for **PowHER Redefined** was conducted by PrismWork in partnership with nFormation and the Billie Jean King Leadership Initiative.

Over the course of two months we:

Moderated intimate salons with over 40 Asian, Black, Latina, and white women to discuss lived experiences, July 2021

Surveyed over 1,500 professional women, August 2021

- 1,181 Women of Color
 - 330 Asian
 - 405 Black
 - 269 Latina
 - 177 Multi-racial, Native American, or Middle Eastern
- 545 white women

Moderated additional intimate salons and conducted selected 1:1 interviews with over 100 Asian, Black, Latina, and white women to discuss solutions, September 2021

We used the race and ethnicity categories as defined by the Census but as mentioned in the [“Monolith”](#) section, we don’t agree that these definitions accurately capture the diversity within our groups, and if left to our own devices, we would remap these categories to more actually describe our history and our lived experiences.



“This research is powerful and significant because it’s about our next generation of leaders. If we don’t act on these results now, we are seriously jeopardizing our future for success.”

– Shirley M. Collado, Ph.D., President Emerita, Ithaca College and Incoming President & CEO, College Track

About Us

nFORMATION

FOR WOMEN OF COLOR

We have created a vetted, membership-based community for high-performing Women of Color which provides specialized programming, safe spaces, corporate coaching, resources, and executive placement opportunities.

FOR CORPORATES

We have created a suite of programs to help companies unlock the leadership potential of Women of Color in their organization by providing research, structural and system transformation, and programmatic consulting services.

For more information: nformation.io



OUR VISION

Everyone regardless of race, gender, religion, ability, or sexual orientation should have equal rights, opportunity, and access. We must ensure people feel comfortable to bring their authentic selves to work every day. Inclusion and equity should be celebrated. People in positions of power must use their platforms to advance positive change.

OUR PURPOSE

TO PROMOTE

equity,
access,
and inclusion

TO ADVOCATE

for equal
pay for
equal work

TO SUPPORT

organizations
that align with
our vision

TO PARTNER

with leaders who
are making
positive change

For more information: bjkli.org

Special Thanks to Our Partner



Meet The Authors

nFORMATION

Deepa Purushothaman (she/her/hers)

Deepa Purushothaman is an author, speaker, and co-founder of nFormation. She is also a Women and Public Policy Program Leader in Practice at the Harvard Kennedy School. Her book, *The First, The Few, The Only. How Women of Color Redefine Power in Corporate America*, will be published by Harper Business in March 2022. Prior to this, she was a Partner at Deloitte.

Rha Goddess (she/her/hers)

Rha Goddess is the co-founder of nFormation and founder of Move the Crowd. She is THE entrepreneurial soul coach behind hundreds of breakthrough changemakers, cultural visionaries, and social entrepreneurs. Rha's book, *The Calling: Three Fundamental Shifts To Stay True, Get Paid and Do Good*, is a blueprint for helping people find their purpose and most profitable contribution.

BILLIE JEAN KING Leadership Initiative

Billie Jean King (she/her/hers)

Billie Jean King is the first female athlete to receive the United States Presidential Medal of Freedom. She was named one of the "100 Most Important Americans of the 20th Century" by Life Magazine. King and eight other women, who are known as the Original 9, led a revolt that created the first women's pro tennis tour. She is the founder of the Billie Jean King Leadership Initiative, the Women's Tennis Association, and the Women's Sports Foundation. King co-founded World TeamTennis. In 2006, the home of the U.S. Open was renamed the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in honor of her accomplishments on and off the court. In 2020, the Fed Cup was renamed the Billie Jean King Cup, making it the first global team sports competition to be named after a woman. King is part of the ownership groups of the Los Angeles Dodgers, Los Angeles Sparks, Philadelphia Freedoms, and Angel City FC. She serves on the board of the Women's Sports Foundation, is an Adidas Global Ambassador, the Honorary Lifetime President of the Elton John AIDS Foundation, and a past member of the President's Council on Fitness, Sports, and Nutrition. Her bestselling memoir, *ALL IN: An Autobiography*, was published in August 2021.

Dr. Sofia B. Pertuz (she/her/ella)

Sofia serves as a Managing Director for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion with Billie Jean King Enterprises. She has over 25 years of experience in strategic planning, assessment, inclusive excellence, and critical incident management in higher education, nonprofit, and corporate organizations. Sofia is committed to creating a socially just world and dedicates time to mentoring, professional development, and activities aiming to create inclusive and caring communities.

Therèsè O'Higgins (she/her/hers)

Therèsè is the Executive Director of the Billie Jean King Leadership Initiative and a Managing Director with Billie Jean King Enterprises. She is dedicated to advancing equity, access, and reimagining the future of work. She has a background in management consulting, having served as a Senior Vice President with Teneo and an Analyst with Accenture.

PRISMWORK

Ashley Wells (she/her/hers)

Ashley Wells is a writer, researcher, and aspiring scholar. She is a graduate student at Columbia University focusing her research efforts on the mental health disparities of Black women. As a Project Manager of PrismWork, she is passionate about strategizing and executing projects related to diversity & inclusion.

Ellen Chamberlain (she/her/hers)

Ellen Chamberlain is a professional ghostwriter, journalist, public speaker, and corporate dropout. She founded EsaidSHEsaid, LLC to service the communications needs of all humans, with a focus on telling the stories of Black people and women.

Lisen Stromberg (she/her/hers)

Lisen Stromberg is a leadership and culture transformation strategist, award-winning author, and widely regarded speaker. As CEO of PrismWork, she and her team partner with companies to help them create highly inclusive, high-performing cultures.

Lori Davis (she/her/hers)

Lori Davis has over 20 years of corporate experience with a proven track record of success creating and executing marketing and business development strategies for global brands including Catholic Charities, United Way, and major financial services organizations such as Citigroup, Prudential, and TIAA-CREF.

Dr. Michele Madansky (she/her/hers)

Dr. Michele Madansky is a digital advertising expert and sought-after media and market research consultant. She is also co-author of the most widely cited research study on gender bias in tech, *The Elephant in the Valley*. She also conducted *The Elephant in Madison Avenue*, which studied gender bias in the advertising industry.

Noni Allwood (she/her/hers)

Noni Allwood is an expert on diversity, equity, and inclusion. An experienced executive, speaker, and research fellow, her work focuses on corporate culture transformation and equality in support of innovation and business success.

Endnotes

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