

# Allyship In Action:

## How Managers Can Support Black Employees Right Now

As a manager, you play a pivotal role in how your team navigates this incredibly challenging time. While it's helpful for employees to hear from company leaders, it is equally critical that they feel directly supported by you as their manager. If you proceed with "business as usual," it sends a message to people that you don't believe this is an important topic worthy of time and conversation.<sup>1,2</sup> To Black employees in particular, it can send a message that you don't value them.

So, how do you lead your team through this difficult time, particularly when it can be hard to find the words to say, and when different team members may need different things? We recommend three specific actions: (1) Speak to your team. Not just once. Make sure that when you meet as a group, your team understands that this is on your mind and it is important to you. (2) Talk to your team members one-on-one. (3) Continue your learning and build ally skills. Below we've shared more specific recommendations.

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### Speak to your team

- One of the most important things you can do is explicitly acknowledge what is happening to the Black community – most recently in the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Nina Pop, and Tony McDade – and the legacy of systemic racism. Let your team know that you believe this is an issue that's important to talk about, and be authentic about how it makes you feel.
- Express an understanding that your team members may be experiencing current events differently – some may need time and space to process and cope. Share what mental health resources and benefits are available to them.<sup>3,4</sup>
- Make yourself available, and let your team know they can come to you if they just want to talk or if they need support.
- Communicate all of the above both live and in writing – it's important for your employees to hear this from you directly, and to be able to revisit your messages.

### Support people one-on-one

- Check in with each employee individually and intentionally. For example, start your next one-on-one by saying, "I know it's a really hard time right now. How are you feeling today?"<sup>5</sup> Be honest and vulnerable about your own feelings, but keep the conversation focused on your employee.

1. Dixon, M.S.H. (2016). [My White Boss Talked About Race in American and This is What Happened](#). Kapor Center.

2. Cadet, D. (2020). [Your Black Colleagues May Look Like They're Okay - Chances Are They're Not](#). Refinery29.

3. Sparks, J. (2020). [7 Virtual Mental Health Resources Supporting Black People Right Now](#). Healthyish.

4. Oehler, C. (2020). [10 Virtual Therapy and Mental Health Apps to Cope with Coronavirus Stress](#). Health.

5. Roberts, L.M., et al. (2020). [How U.S. Companies Can Support Employees of Color Through the Pandemic](#). Harvard Business Review.

### Support people one-on-one (continued)

- Provide additional support to Black employees. For example:
  - Ask if they need to take time off, or if you can support them in any additional ways right now.
  - Acknowledge how hard it might be to focus right now, and offer to shift deadlines.
  - Ask what you can take off their plate. When offering support, it's always most helpful to be specific—for example, look at your team member's calendar and offer to take a specific project off their plate or support them in an upcoming meeting.

### Continue your learning and practice allyship

- Educate yourself on [how to be a better ally](#) and leader, but don't burden Black employees with the extra working of helping you learn. Read books and articles,<sup>6</sup> follow Black activists on social media<sup>7</sup>, use Google.
- Identify opportunities to [make your own decisions more inclusive](#). Consider all of the key areas where you make decisions about people, from delegating work to making hiring, compensation, and promotion decisions, and build strategies to reduce bias and promote equity in those decisions.

### What NOT to do

- Avoid statements that suggest everyone is having the same experience (e.g., "We're all in this together.") While often well-intentioned, these statements discount the unique experience Black people are having right now.<sup>8</sup>
- Don't single out Black employees or put them on the spot to talk about their experiences in front of their peers without their express permission.
- Don't expect Black employees to lead the conversation on race or contribute to solutions—instead, lean on your organization's internal diversity, equity, and inclusion team or external consultants.
- If your team members don't take you up on your offer to talk about these issues, honor that and extend the offer again after some time. There are a number of reasons employees of color in particular may not want to talk about race.<sup>9</sup>

6. Boise, M.D. [How To Be A Strong White Ally](#).

7. McCarthy, J. (2017). [9 Black Activists Who Are Fighting Injustice in the US](#). Global Citizen.

8. Wilton, L.S. (2015). [Communicating More Than Diversity: The Effect of Institutional Diversity Statements on Expectations and Performance as a Function of Race and Gender](#). Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology.

9. Thomas, E.L. (2020). [Well-meaning managers/allies: Black and brown employees don't always want to talk about race](#). Twitter.