WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

Case Study Scenarios

Instructions

1. FIRST, Take a few moments to fully read the scenario assigned to your group.
2. THEN, review the Discussion Questions and, if necessary, re-read the scenario again with the lens of the prompts.
3. As a group, move through the discussion prompts and capture your thoughts as you go.
4. Before returning to the main space, identify one member from your group to present your responses. (Ideally this will be someone we haven't heard from as much throughout the course.)
5. Determine, together, which are the most important points, as your representative will have only 2-3 minutes to summarize where you've landed.

Group Discussion Questions

- Where and how do you see white supremacy culture showing up?
- If you were in a position to act, how would you proceed?
- What would you need to make informed choices?
- What questions would you ask? Who would you consult?
- What dynamics are at play here? Considering social identity, power and hierarchy, etc.
- What skill sets or capacities are needed to effectively navigate this challenge?

Product to Market - Scenario 1

A community-based organization with a multi-pillar mission, recognized it was lop-sided in its services… ie. they were having great impact towards Empowering Women but had not yet given the same focus and attention to the Eliminating Racism element of their work. When the time came to search for a new CEO, the Board of Directors hoped to identify a candidate who would bring the skills, understanding and lived experiences necessary to elevate the organization as a leader in racial justice.

And they were successful! As a Woman of Color, the new CWO could point to experiences in her own life where racism reared its head - both from interpersonal interactions, as well as within institutions and systems.

The CEO was ready to tackle the work of eliminating racism, but the current staff had not yet fully embraced the work. For the most part, these were individuals who came to the organization for the Empowering Women focus. That's what they were hired for and this new focus on race and racism was not part of their skill sets or lexicon, its not what they had signed up for. Whether it was fear, fragility or an unwillingness to break from the status quo, several of the staff members chose to leave YWCA.

While this staff exodus was an opportunity for the new CEO to cultivate their own team, seeking individuals who were ready to confront and dismantle systemic racism, it would take time. Simultaneously, the conversations of race and systemic racism were rising in public discourse. And this left the Board of Directors uneasy. *"If more people are talking about race and racism, we need to be out there!"* The Board set an expectation that the new CEO launch a training program about race and racism. This program should create a viable revenue stream for the organization, as well as position them as experts in the field. With growing anticipation, they wanted this product to market… yesterday.

An intern was tasked in developing a "Lunch-and-Learn" series. The CEO recognized it would also be necessary to have external support, someone with professional background and expertise in training and racial justice. A white DEI consultant, who centers race in their work, was hired to guide and coach the intern, round out any rough edges of the series and help formalize a replicable curriculum model.

After their initial review of the Lunch-and-Learn modules, the consultant returned to the CEO expressing significant concern about the content, the facilitation skills among YWCA staff to

navigate conversations about racism and their predictions about negative impact if YWCA were to move forward bringing this product to market. *"I worry that if you move forward, white folks with little experience will eat this up and feel it's great. BIPOC will be subjected to harm and likely see this as the "same old sh*%" that hasn't moved the needle yet. Furthermore if you position yourselves as racial justice experts - when you are not racial justice experts- you may do irrevocable damage to the organization's reputation."*

Racism is in *here,* too - Scenario 2

Within the period of a year, three members of a non-profit organization's Board of Directors resigned and/or did not opt to re-up for their second term. All three were People of Color. This *should* be distressing to any organization. But it was particularly concerning as this organization included, eliminating racism within its mission statement.

Exit interviews were conducted and reasons for departure included lifestyle changes that made the time commitment a challenge, frustration with inactivity around the eliminating racism work among others. And, some of the remaining Board Member of Color suggested to the CEO there may also be some unspoken reasons relating to Board policies (minimum financial gift) and procedures (Robert's Rules of Order) that unintentionally uphold systemic racism, as well as a Board culture of whiteness.

As such the CEO and Governance committee embarked on reviewing some of the more obvious policies regarding Board member criteria that were based in archaic and oppressive models. The committee suggested revisions to such policies and also proposed shifting from a Chair, Vice Chair leadership model to a Co-Chair Leadership model, with a commitment for at least one chair to be a Woman of Color. A vocal minority expressed significant concerns and resistance. The board engaged in deep discussion about the possible risks of changes and the possible risks with NOT changing. The suggestions were approved… eventually.

The same voices who were expressing concern around these changes, were also the ones urging the CEO to push out fee-for-service public programming on racial justice as soon as possible. In a subsequent meeting, when frustration was expressed again at the perceived inaction of racial justice work and criticism of internal staff learning, a Board member of Color spoke up.

They shared that yes, they too were eager to see the organization bring forward a public program. However, they were frustrated and concerned about the criticism of internal learning, noting that many of the Board members have not chosen to participate in the learning offerings available to them. "We have to stop acting like racism is only a problem that's "out there!" Can we recognize that racism is in HERE too? We aren't immune to racism just because we want to fight against it."

A white fragility grenade exploded and the board erupted in turmoil that carried on for weeks. Board members of color were feeling silenced and punished for naming their truths. A

number of white board members threatened to resign. All board members were left feeling unsteady and unsafe in participating in organizational leadership.

Sitting in the Ivory Tower, Scenario 3

A new Executive is hired for a non-profit organization that predominantly serves low income communities. The organization was running two signature programs. The first was a financial literacy and prosperity training series. This program operated out of the same office space as the organization's Administration (i.e. CEO, Development staff, Marketing Team, etc.). The other was a program operated out of a community center dedicated to feeding low-income seniors and was located across town.

From their earliest impressions, even during the interview process, the Executive recalled feeling something just "wasn't right" about the Administrative Offices location. They were housed in a large, high end office building. Imagine it – beautiful external architecture, coy ponds and well-kept grounds. Inside, dark wood accents, hotel quality decor and a large curving staircase leading up from the main lobby. Eat your heart out, Posh Spice. The Executive felt uneasy being in such a high-end space.

After a few months in the role, and making several visits to the cross-town Community Center location, the Executive began to realize they were navigating two very different staff cultures. These two signature programs operated completely in silos and with little to no interaction among staff. Once, at an ALL-STAFF gathering to honor a retiring team member, the Community Center staff kept referring to the Financial Literacy and Admin team as "corporate." Very quickly the Executive recognized an us-them dynamic that was antithetical to the organization's mission.

The combination of the staff division and the uneasiness of renting space in a high- end office building was enough to stir the Executive into action. Turning to the Board of Directors, they invited input and ideas on how to reckon with this challenge. "My team is not a connected team. Half of us spend our days MILES away from the other half. Our high-end location does not foster opportunities to build community with those we serve. I'm not sure what value this office location brings us."

Some board members acknowledged the complications, but countered with value statements for the current office location. "Think about our funding partners, they are used to for-profit spaces and an aesthetic that our location offers." or "Think about some of the other non-profit agencies we want to partner with. Our location sends a message that we are a mature, financially sound organization. And while it shouldn't matter…for many, status does matter."

The Executive had a decision to make. What other office spaces are available? What kind of move will support greater relationships among the team? And then… a pandemic happened. Administrative and Financial Literacy staff were sent to work from home. Community Center staff were needed onsite to continue preparing and delivering meals. The equity gap grew.

Social Justice Smackdown, Scenario 4

Having made a commitment to racial justice learning, a non-profit Executive Director invested in a year-long contract with a Racial Justice practitioner to develop the capacity of all team members to approach their work through the lens of racial equity. This work was to be carried out through facilitated discussions, 1:1 coaching sessions and a 6-part learning series.

Some team members came to the work with a strong foundation of previous learning and/or lived experiences. Some showed up to the experiences hungry for the challenge. Others came to conversations well-intended, but guarded and fearful. And others still - attended because they were expected to.

To navigate the many different "starting places," the consultant, the ED and the staff agreed "to honor where others were on their racial justice awareness journeys," essentially offer a safe space - a brave space for learning. This type of engagement agreement is all well and good when it comes to intention. It is much harder to uphold when things start to get messy… In the early months of the experience, group learning moved smoothly as it primarily focused on grounding into a shared language and unpacking foundational concepts related to racial justice.

But as time went on and the material shifted from knowledge-building (theory) to skill-building and applications (practice), the work got messier day-by-day. A distinction between those who went "All In" and those who continued to "check" with caution became apparent. In some cases, impatience and a hypervigilance against whiteness emerged, creating a "call out" culture among those who hadn't yet honed practices of loving accountability and bridging difference.

As such, tensions grew. The white team members in earlier stages of their learning journeys became increasingly cautious. Not wanting to make a mistake, they often opted for silence or asked for staff of Color to advise them. Staff of Color felt the undue burden of emotional labor and requested to "opt out" from some of the team-based learning sessions. And the white staff deeper in the learning path seemed to participate in "out-woking" others, assuming a level of moral superiority.

In short, the organization was suffering from a Social Justice Smackdown - when passion (or exhaustion) creates an oppressive urgency for others to "get it," to "get it right," and to "get it

right now." It is when the pendulum swings too far in the opposite direction, undermining the collective desire to advance racial justice. The Executive Director needed to do something to reunify the team before it was too late.