

# It's Time to Talk about Race at Work



EVERY LEADER'S GUIDE  
TO MAKING PROGRESS ON  
DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

**Kelly McDonald**

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# **IT'S TIME TO TALK ABOUT RACE AT WORK**

**EVERY LEADER'S GUIDE TO MAKING  
PROGRESS ON DIVERSITY, EQUITY,  
AND INCLUSION**

**KELLY McDONALD**

**WILEY**

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***Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:***

Names: McDonald, Kelly, 1961- author. | John Wiley & Sons, publisher.

Title: It's time to talk about race at work : every leader's guide to making progress on diversity, equity, and inclusion / Kelly McDonald.

Description: Hoboken, New Jersey : Wiley, [2021] | Includes index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2021008528 (print) | LCCN 2021008529 (ebook) | ISBN 9781119790877 (cloth) | ISBN 9781119790884 (adobe pdf) | ISBN 9781119790891 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Diversity in the workplace.

Classification: LCC HF5549.5.M5 M426 2021 (print) | LCC HF5549.5.M5 (ebook) | DDC 658.3008-dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021008528>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021008529>

Cover image: Getty Images | W RPHT WPHAKDI PHECHR / EYEEM

Cover design: Paul McCarthy

*To Liliana Ramírez, for all the brilliant insights from your  
brilliant mind.*

*To JB, for hanging in there with me on this. Again.*

*And to George.*

Do the best you can until you know better.  
Then when you know better, do better.

—Maya Angelou

# Acknowledgments

I started writing this book in September 2020 and finished it in early January 2021. It was a dark time to take on this subject: Life and business were disrupted immeasurably due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Nationwide unrest, protests, riots, and violence seemed a part of daily life.

I am an optimist at heart—not in a rainbows and unicorns unrealistic way, but I do believe in hope. As the grind of the pandemic and faltering economy wore on, I found my nerves frayed and saw the same in others. I needed an anchor, a way of staying focused on knowing what I can control and what I can't, and a way of remaining hopeful when hope seemed like more of a concept than an actual feeling. I decided to anchor myself to the word *resilience*. Every day, I see resilient people, moving forward against difficult odds, facing their fears and obstacles, overcoming setbacks, and extending generosity to others. It's easy to be generous when times are good. What is deeply moving to me is seeing generosity when times are challenging. Everyone had their own struggles, their own problems, and their own burdens in 2020, yet so many people helped me with this book. I needed their help.

I am a White woman, and I was writing a book about race and how to talk about it at work. I don't have the personal experiences and insights that people of color and other minority groups have. I needed different perspectives to illustrate a complete picture of the challenges of talking about race at work. In the beginning of this book project, I told a few people in my circle what I was doing and why. Their responses were immediate, generous, and, for some, very time intensive. From “I know someone you should talk to” or “I have an example you might be able to use” to

simply “What can I do to help?” their eagerness to assist and their contributions blew me away. They contributed stories, insights, and experiences because they believe what I believe: *We grow stronger when we confront our problems rather than ignore them.* If we talk about our problems, we can solve them or, at a minimum, make inroads on solutions. And when we work with people who are not like us, we become smarter—and better. I believe this with all my heart, and I am inspired that so many others feel the same.

There is no way I will ever be able to fully express my gratitude to all those in my life and in my orbit who helped in ways big and small, but I'll try my best:

To Richard Narramore, my editor, for keenly understanding what business book readers need—and why. For fostering the conversations that most people don't want to have and don't know how to approach. I'm thankful for your steady hand on the rudder when I veered off course. And for all the hours on the phone with me and the countless emails on New Year's Eve day to help me finish the manuscript on time. I say this with every new book, but I mean it more each time: I am grateful that out of all the editors in the world, you're mine.

To Deborah Schindlar, Victoria Anllo, Angela Morrison, and the entire team at Wiley, for developing and creating great books that help move business forward. Thank you for supporting me and sharing my conviction that diversity is a powerful business tool.

To Pam Atherton, for sending relevant content and contacts my way before I ever even asked. For the texts and calls and gifs and memes that kept me going. For your thoughtful commentary on subjects important—and mundane. Sometimes, the mundane ones are the best ones.

To Cliff Bohaker, for always making the effort to stay in touch with calls, videos, texts, and visits. I am not sure which of those are the most ridiculous—keep 'em coming! I love you and our adventures.

To Carrie Bratcher: You and I were emailing about work stuff when I got the call with the approval for this book. You were the first person I told about it, and thirty minutes later, you sent me content that you thought might be helpful. Yep. You're amazing.

To Jess and Rich Fierro, for taking the time to share their vision and story with me. You truly “walk the talk” and set an inspiring example of how business is better when diversity is on tap.

To Tamara Ghandour, for being the break I needed, whenever I needed it. Thank you for the laughs, the insights, the never-ending fun, the juicy stories about *everything* under the sun, the shared Reese's, Bang drinks, and peanut crack. You're wicked smart and wicked funny and you charge my battery every time we get together.

To Chris Heim at AbeTech, for being terrific to work with and an inspiration every day. I love the way your mind works and your devotion to servant leadership. The world needs more people like you.

To Quiana Hughes, for your time, your insights, your stories, and your experiences. Your input helped shape this book and got me out of the gate. I'm game for dinner again *anytime*—I adore you.

To Kiki: You made sheltering at home in 2020 bearable. Thanks for watching trashy TV with me in the evenings when I needed to unwind.

To Jenny Kruppenacher and the entire diversity team at Zebra Technologies, for “walking the walk” on diversity, equity, and inclusion and allowing me to be a Zebra too.

And to Nena Petrunic Bricchetto, Galy Navarro, Caroline Zepeda, Helle Terp Kidbane, and Julia Roberts: You are the BEST. And so, so fun.

To Jennifer Martin, the first to call me when my mom passed away. I'll never forget your voicemail message of simply, "Kelly, I got you." Thank you for always being there for me, no matter how much time has passed between our talks. And to Joe Martin and Jake Martin, my "other family members": I love you.

To my siblings, Randi and Mike, for the meaningful reconnection and support and gift of real family.

To Randy Pierce, my friend and my coach, for teaching me so much more than boxing. I cherish our conversations, your insights, and your humor. You have the ability to make me laugh harder than I thought I could, and you've changed my life in more ways than you'll *ever* know.

To Kenja Purkey, for getting this topic and getting me in general. For taking my calls *whenever*. For never, ever losing your sense of humor, even when you're juggling more than anyone else I know. #RighteousKenja

To Bill Sandberg: You're a great boxing partner and friend and I'll spar with you anytime. Glove up and I'll see you in the ring!

To Sally Shoquist, for the laughs and rants—and then more laughs. I feel better after every call with you and after every one of your amazing salads. Looking forward to sitting on your deck with you on more sunny afternoons.

To Robert Swafford: Without you, I wouldn't have the circle of friends I have. Thanks for always being there for me and for being the head of the octopus in our group.

To Lynne Swihart: Your friendship, snark, and wit are the gas in my tank. Here's to the next decade of our close

friendship and escapades.

To my clients, who became my friends. You have cheered me on, encouraged me and you're the reason I do what I do. Special shout-outs to Joe Aldez, Ron Arrigo, Steven Braybrook, Susan Freibrun and the entire staff of MHEDA, Erika Goode, Cris Hay-Merchant, Jeff Hurt, Bill Lewis, Lynne Marchese, Kathleen Overlin, Liz Richards, Vince Rodriguez, Chuck Rusch, Bill Rutherford, Team Zebra, Brett Vanderkolk, Liz Walz, Lola Woloch, and Terry Young.

And to every reader of this book: You know why this topic matters and why it matters now. I may never know you, but I know your intentions. You make a difference. *Thank you.*

## Special Acknowledgments

When I started writing this book, I needed perspective, expertise, and insights from people who are professionally immersed in diversity, equity, and inclusion. DE&I is a critically important topic—and a sensitive one. I needed expert help to create a realistic path of progress that anyone, at any size organization, could follow. Not every business has a Diversity Department or even an HR professional. Small business owners need realistic and actionable tactics that don't cost a million dollars or take a year to get off the ground. I needed the help of people who understood exactly what readers of this book want and need, and I reached out to Liliana Ramírez, Joy Pierce, and David Phillips.

Many, many people contributed to making this book come to life, but these experts shared their wisdom, experiences, approaches, findings, and advice, freely and generously. Each heads up a business or department, so they have their own demanding, full-time roles, yet they made time for this book. Their commitment and dedication to this book cannot be overstated. I am deeply grateful to them and wish to acknowledge their significant contributions:

To Liliana Ramírez, for your tireless efforts, over *months*, and your commitment to helping businesspeople develop effective and realistic diversity programs. For nearly two decades, I've been in awe of your work, your humor, your patience, the way your mind works, and your ability to always see the path forward, no matter how complicated or unclear. Without your research, this book would not exist. Without your insights, our readers would not have a usable framework for talking about race at work. Your time, dedication, and focus ensured we met every deadline, took

care of every client and every project, and created a book we both believe in. I'll never be able to fully express my gratitude.

To Joy Pierce, for your vast and important contributions to this book. Your examples, suggested approaches, candor, insights, and complete willingness to help me when you didn't even know me speaks to your generous heart and desire to create change. Our first phone call lasted *three hours* and we both know it could have gone on forever. You took every call from me, regardless of whether it was day or night, and responded to every text and query to keep me moving and on track to meet my deadlines. You started off as a valued resource, but you became my friend. You're stuck with me now.

To David Phillips, for your insights, anecdotes, experience, proven techniques, and recommendations on how to talk about difficult topics in productive and constructive ways. You made this book a priority and your contributions are matched only by your passion and commitment to a better world for everyone.



Liliana Ramírez

President, LunaNova Marketing—Diversity and  
Communications Strategy for the World



Joy Pierce, Ph.D.

Associate Professor, University of Utah



David deBardelaben- Phillips  
Founder and President  
Energetic Awakenings

# **PART I**

## **If You're Not Racist, What's the Problem? The Biggest Mistakes People (and Businesses) Make**