

Dear white corporate America,

I get it. I know you have the best intentions.

I know you're horrified and heartbroken by the killings of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, Tony McDade, Breonna Taylor, and too many others to name.

You want to take a stand against the racial injustice and anti-Black prejudice built into the very foundation of America. You want to do the right thing. But you just don't know how.

Is that about right?

I know it is, because you've been calling me. For the past two weeks, several times a day, it's been the same question: What can I do?

Let me break it down for you.

For starters, the fact that you're only asking now is part of the problem. Companies have been profiting off Black culture and Black consumers for decades.

Are you just now realizing that all Black lives matter, not just those of Black artists and athletes? Not just Black dollars? Ask yourself, truthfully. That's step zero.

Next, listen. Before you open your mouth, open your eyes and ears. Listen to your Black employees. They've been sounding the alarm for years. But don't stop there. Dig into the cold, hard Black data. Learn where Black people exist in your company—and, more importantly, where they don't. Count the too-few Black faces in meetings. Notice the muted Black voices in conversations where decisions get made. If you do that, you'll see the problem clear as day.

You're not nurturing your Black talent. You're not benefiting from Black experiences, relationships, perspectives, insights, and ideas. And most importantly, you're not doing the right thing.

But don't feel bad about that. Now is not the time to beat yourself up, or to obsess about the ten ways you might get it wrong. That helps no one. What helps is fixing the problem. And you can do that. You can fix this.

To me, this isn't only a social justice problem or an equal opportunity problem. This is a business problem, too. And you fix business problems all the time. So, you got this.

But just in case you don't "got it," let me help you out. Here's a game plan:

Inside your company walls, you need to hire more Black people. Period.

On one side of the equation, that means fixing the "pipeline" challenge, once and for all. So, redouble your efforts to identify, recruit, attract, develop, and elevate Black talent. Fund educational institutions that champion Black students and their futures.

On the other side of the equation, that means helping Black talent climb the ladder, and turning over power and authority to rising Black leaders. Retention and promotion is just as urgent as recruiting and hiring. In fact, the former accelerates the latter. I guarantee you.

Analyze where you are as an organization. Set goals for where you want to be. Put in place incentives to achieve those goals. Measure against them ruthlessly and relentlessly with KPIs. This is core-business stuff, not extra credit.

Oh, and while you're at it, stop with the BS office microaggressions. Check yourself before you call a Black person "aggressive," "disruptive," or "difficult." That goes a long way. Trust me.

Those are the internal moves.

Outside your walls, you have to step up. As businesses, you have obligations to the communities you benefit from. And that work has to start now. Time is of the essence.

Support Black organizations who are fighting to revolutionize criminal justice and public safety in the United States. Invest in Black-owned businesses and Black business leaders. Buy Black. Create a cycle of Black opportunity and Black prosperity.

And help shore up our democracy: Be part of the progress. Mobilize voters. Help Black consumers hold politicians accountable. Don't sit on the sidelines.

Those are the external moves.

I know this sounds like a lot. And my own story demonstrates how hard this all is, but also how important.

I grew up in Brooklyn during the age of stop-and-frisk. I was arrested as a college student in Atlanta during the era of Red Dog policing. I sold mixtapes in a flea market to pay for school, before working my way from the bottom to the top of America's favorite companies—from junior associate at Nike to CMO at Beats and the top 1 percent of executives at Apple.

Everything they call Black employees in the workplace—creative, but "just a kid"; cool, but "not a cultural fit"—they called me all of it. Some said, stick to "urban" marketing, not global marketing. Others said, you don't have the "skills" to be a top boss.

Thankfully, I had my own board of directors. One amazing Black mentor, and a group of white leaders who made a bet on me—and won big. The results speak for themselves: I helped create billions of dollars in enterprise value.

Here's the bottom line: This isn't the time for another "diversity report," or for any report at all. This is a time for action, inside and outside. This is a time for change: inside ourselves and our companies; across our communities and our country.

No doubt, it's daunting. You may feel pummeled, or paralyzed. I understand. But lean into the discomfort. It's okay. I have faith in you, corporate America. Like I said, you can fix this. We can fix this.

So, before you call me again—before you ask me what you should say, or what you should change—I'll tell you my answer right now: Absolutely everything.

See you in the room.

Sincerely,

