



**RADICAL ACCEPTANCE
IS THE SOLUTION**

Risha Grant

For over 25 years now, I have been consulting with companies about diversity and inclusion.

This was long before the word “equity” was included. I’ve watched the concepts go from apathy to mild interest, to the hottest internal HR and community initiatives that brought the word “equity” into the mix, to now DEI fatigue.

I’m Risha Grant, a DEI and bias expert, author and international speaker who started the first diversity and inclusion firm in one of the most conservative states in the nation. When I started this journey all those years ago, I thought it would be a breeze if I just educated people on why it was needed because I believed people were inherently kind and decent.

What do I think now?

I don’t believe there is a more divisive issue in human existence than the concepts of diversity, equity, and inclusion. In fact, it’s no secret that it seems to cause people on both sides of the issue to feel heartburn. It activates an us versus them mentality. People think, if they hire them, what will happen to us?

For all the years that companies have been in existence, the pendulum has swung in favor of white people being employed, promoted, and paid their worth. As the world sought

more equality, affirmative action was introduced to level the playing field. It has been dangled like forbidden fruit for people of color.

For white folks, it brings about worries of reverse discrimination and unfair policies that might leave them out of the hiring process.

For people of color, they worry that if they are hired for a job, it's not because of their skills but to fulfill a quota. They fear being known as the "diversity hire." Someone who only got their job because of affirmative action, but no skillset to back it up.

Enter the recent Supreme Court ruling to reverse affirmative action in higher education admissions and the ball starts rolling back down the hill destroying hundreds of years of miniscule progress. Most notably, is how this will affect business and corporations, which are the backbone of our society.

There is no doubt that it will introduce a less diverse pipeline of students entering the workforce after college. For the diverse people already in the workforce, the concern is that it may unravel any progress made over the past few years as our country had a massive reckoning around issues of race, LGBTQ+, equity, systemic racism and more.

So, how do we deal with the fear, whispers, and backroom conversations of an attack on DEI programs in the corporate world?

We build a BS Free Culture through radical acceptance.

RADICAL ACCEPTANCE

A guy walks into a bar and sits next to a woman who is tired AF after a nonstop series of training sessions at a big bank in downtown Chicago. Her exhaustion must show because he asks, "Long day?"

"Yep," she replies, and she's got another one planned for tomorrow.

"I'm here for work too," he says. He introduces himself as Mike.

The woman, always networking and looking for her next gig, asks, "What kind of work do you do?"

Mike explains that he manages a high-end custom construction company. He spends a lot of time on the road, traveling throughout the U.S. making sure the job is well done.

She tells him she's a trainer.

"What kind of training?" he asks.

She offers her usual playful response. "I teach adults how to respect each other."

He laughs. "What?"

"It's true," she says, smiling. "I get paid the big bucks to remind adults to treat each other with common courtesy and respect."

“Bullshit!” he says, his eyes wide.

Now she’s the one laughing. “You just summed it up. I literally teach people to get rid of their BS.”

They continue to laugh and make small talk at the bar, then decide to toast to one very long day. He orders another beer; she raises her glass of white wine. After clinking glasses, he looks at the woman and says with admiration, “Wow. You are such a credit to your race.”

The woman—who is Black—puts her drink down hard, and sharply turns her face to him. “What did you say, white boy?”

The man pauses, then quickly smiles, and says in what he seems to think is a reassuring tone, “No, let me explain. See, most Black people don’t want to work really hard; they just want things handed to them. Not you, though!”

The Black woman fixes him with a stony look. “You know this isn’t going well, right?”

The Black woman was me, and no, this isn’t a bar joke. It was 2018, but this encounter with a young professional in his thirties was a reminder that there are a lot of folks out there still stuck in 1962.

In that moment, I had a choice: I could be right, or I could win.

Not that I needed another reminder. As a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) expert and consultant, it's my job to not only confront this reality but help others see it too. My work as a culture connector—during which I encourage employees to honestly (often anonymously) share their perspectives and opinions about topics such as race, gender, age, and sexual orientation—reveals that the majority of people, most of whom would vigorously deny they were prejudiced or discriminatory, have thoughts like these racing through their cranium:

- Black parents who give their kids weird names aren't doing them any favors.
- Why do those men keep their beards? They look like terrorists.
- You can't get promoted in accounting unless you're Jewish.
- What's with these women having babies and expecting us to cover for them while they take time off?
- I wish the company would quit hiring people with Spanish accents. They're too hard to understand.
- Another one wearing a cross. You know they're all homophobes.
- Some people seem to think they can just flaunt their gayness at the office. It's not appropriate.

- I can't believe this guy wants me to use female pronouns when speaking to him. How the hell am I supposed to remember that when he looks like a man?
- Millennials are lazy.
- Old people need to make room for the rest of us. Why don't they just retire already?

Still, my new drinking buddy's racist statement threw me for a loop. We'd been having an awesome time together, and now the night was ruined. The weight of four hundred years of history, plus one long-ass workday, settled around my neck and shoulders, and all I wanted to do was curse him out and go back to my hotel room so I could be alone.

But I didn't curse him out, because in that moment, I had a choice: I could be right, or I could win.

Telling Mike off would have felt satisfying and right. But after I'd stormed out of the bar, what would have happened? He'd have probably sat there feeling defensive. Maybe he would have decided that I was the one who'd created a problem where there was none by being over-sensitive, or blowing his words out of proportion, or misunderstanding what he meant. Because he knew he wasn't racist, he'd tell himself. He wasn't a bad person.

Yet as much as I wasn't in the mood to work overtime, wasn't this exactly what I'd signed up for 25 years ago when I'd committed to teaching people about inequality, diversity, and inclusion? What if I could open Mike's eyes and help him see his racist BS? What if by walking away, I was missing a chance to help him understand why his words

had cut so deeply? What if I, a Black, bisexual, ex-preacher's wife, could move the needle just a little bit and spare anyone else in his path the disrespect he'd just unloaded on me?

That would be a win. And I was willing to sacrifice being right for the win.

So, I stayed. He didn't understand what he'd done wrong, but Mike did know he'd hurt me, and for that he apologized. I accepted and suggested that a great way to make it up to me would be to let me explain why what he'd said was problematic. He agreed. In fact, he offered to buy me dinner.

Over the course of our meal, I pointed out that Black people have always worked hard. I mean, let's think about how and why we were brought to this country in the first place. And I gave him a rapid-fire history lesson—encompassing Jim Crow laws, lynching, redlining, separate but equal, the Red Summer and the destruction of Black Wall Street, the “war on drugs” that was actually a war on poor people and Black folks, voter suppression, and the structurally racist systems that hinder the political, professional, and economic success of BIPOC to such an extent that whites hold 85 percent of all upper-level executive jobs and Blacks receive less than 1 percent of venture capital—to demonstrate that we have never had anything handed to us.

Finally, I explained that the praise he thought he'd given me was actually a backhanded compliment (or a microaggression), because what he was really saying was that most Black people were not worthy of respect, but somehow, I was different. Except if he spoke with and interacted with more Black people, he'd know that people like me were legion; we just face obstacles that never even cross his radar.

I listened too. That's how I learned how Mike, a decent and cool guy, could say something so blatantly racist to me without giving it a second thought. He had grown up in a small, predominantly white town and hadn't spent a lot of time around Black people for most of his life. He'd been taught his racist ideas from a young age, and it had never occurred to him to question them. When he wasn't traveling, he lived in a house at the end of a mile-long driveway, so far from the neighbors, he said, he could sit on the porch naked if he wanted to.

I told him that the problem wasn't who he was or where he came from, but that the racism and prejudice he'd absorbed and spit back out was built into the very foundations of our society, causing pain and obstacles to me and millions of other BIPOC every day. And then I told him how he could be a part of the solution.

Mike's reaction to our conversation alternated between surprise, shock, embarrassment, and frustration. In total we spent four to five hours together that night. I got a big steak dinner and a bottle of wine out of that conversation, but more important, I made an ally.

Being better than our BS requires un-learning much of what we've been taught by the people we love and the institutions we trust most.

Three years later, I still occasionally get texts from Mike, who likes to tell me about moments when he's spoken up when witnessing racism or bigotry.

What's exciting to me is that these stories aren't just taking place in his hometown or with family members, where you might expect. He's bravely speaking up at work, calling out racist or bigoted jokes, remarks, and incidents that could cause people to feel uncomfortable or invisible on job sites. He's made a concerted effort to create a better work environment for his team, one where everyone feels safe and is treated with respect and consideration. Within minutes, anyone who works with him knows racism, prejudice, and bigotry won't be tolerated.

And in the time he's been actively confronting racism, bigotry, and prejudice, without passing judgment and from a place of compassion and understanding—after all, not long ago he was saying some of the same crap he now shuts down—he has not lost a single employee, client, or colleague.

What did I use to help this guy, as oblivious to his entrenched racism as anyone I've ever met, recognize that his beliefs about Black people and pretty much anyone who wasn't just like him were false and harmful, and inspire him to engage in anti-racist work... at work?

The same thing I teach my clients every day: how to use Radical Acceptance to become better than their BS.

What's Radical Acceptance? It's the practice of welcoming and embracing our full humanity, without BS, full stop.

What's so radical about it? It's transformative. Being better than our BS requires unlearning much of what we've been taught by the people we love and the institutions we trust most. The result is a dramatic shift in perspective that makes the world look completely different from the one we thought we lived in.

What's BS? Oh, it's bullshit, for sure. More specifically, though, it's the often invisible, always powerful belief systems we've been steeped in since birth. These belief systems established the rules and standards against which we judge ourselves and others, leading us to unconsciously show preference for people who fit within those rules and standards, and develop biases against those who don't. We express those biases as racism, sexism, ageism, homophobia, and other prejudices. Silently, insidiously, our BS shapes how we feel about ourselves, how we perceive the world, and consequently, how we interact with others.

Corporate America is engaged in a period of massive change, so while we're remaking the work environment, let's really remake the work environment. Because the system isn't broken. The system is working exactly as it was designed. Which means the only solution is to tear it completely down.

The systemic racism in the U.S. used to make me believe this country wasn't built for people like me. Today, a national reckoning and the business world's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion has some people scared shitless the future won't be made for them. They don't have to be.

Radical Acceptance replaces fear with confidence, and the threat of scarcity with a sense of security. Through this process, thousands of leaders, managers, and employees have successfully started breaking down the biases and racism that exists in their workplaces, and reveling in the improved morale, retention, productivity, and profits that result.

Best of all, whereas once they used to unwittingly carry their biases into the workplace, now they're consciously carrying the lessons they've learned at work out into the world and applying them toward their daily interactions with friends, family, and faith communities. Business may be the engine of our country, but people are the heart of business. When the corporate world becomes better than its BS and empowers everyone to show up to work as their best, most authentic selves, the benefits will cascade outward.

That's when America will finally fulfill its spectacular promise. 🇺🇸



Info



Ready to dig deeper into the book?
Buy a copy of [Be Better Than Your BS](#).

Want copies for your organization or for an event?
We can help: customerservice@porchlightbooks.com
800-236-7323

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Risha Grant is the founder & CEO of Risha Grant, LLC, an award-winning diversity consulting, communications, and speaking firm. She's been featured in *Forbes*, *Harvard Business Review*, *HR News*, *The Financial Times*, *Glamour magazine UK*, *Bloomberg Media*, and *Black Enterprise* among others.

Risha has received numerous honors such as being named one of the Top 10 Most Powerful Women Leaders in HR in 2021, one of 40 Top Women Keynote Speakers, the NBA Thunder Changemaker Award in 2020, among others.

SHARE THIS

Pass along a copy of this manifesto to others.

SUBSCRIBE

Sign up for e-news to learn when our latest manifestos are available.



Porchlight

Curated and edited by the people of Porchlight, ChangeThis is a vehicle for big ideas to spread. Keep up with the latest book releases and ideas at porchlightbooks.com.

This document was created on August 16, 2023 and is based on the best information available at that time.

The copyright of this work belongs to the author, who is solely responsible for the content. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs License. To view a copy of this license, visit Creative Commons. Cover art from Adobe Stock.