Chapter 8
Black Women, Emotional Intelligence, and Organizational Opportunities for Growth

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ABSTRACT

Since the end of 2019, the world has been trying to identify ways to deal with the dual pandemics of COVID-19 and the racial reckoning that arose during the summer of 2020. Organizations have scrambled to re-energize diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. The questions to be asked are why are organizations focusing their efforts on DEI initiatives, and how can they be successful? This chapter introduces and examines emotional intelligence as a vehicle leveraged by both authors and many other Black women, including Black diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) practitioners, as a means for advancement within their organizations. The authors further offer that in order for organizations to achieve equity and inclusion, emotional intelligence is a required baseline, and the support of DEI practitioners in this arena will create an array of positive effects, such as a harmonious work environment, self-actualized individuals including Black women, and thus personal, community, and organizational success.

"The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any."— Alice Walker

Energized by the process of improving, we find passion in learning new facts, exploring new ideas, and applying what we have learned in various environments. Dr. Jiménez, a true people-enthusiast, and Dr.

Moore, an advocate for women's and girls' rights, approach writing this piece with the same curiosity and expectation that it will drive change for those who generously take the time to experience this learning.

As two Black women, the authors, one a Black Hispanic and the other an African American, have both experienced the intersectionality of being a woman and being Black and the undermining that takes place at both levels. The concept of intersectionality speaks about the double burden Black women often experience when discriminated against based on race and gender (Crenshaw, 1989). Black women's experiences are not merely one or the other; they are both Black and female. Regrettably, a framework does not exist to address the meeting of these two dimensions, creating an environment that obscures their existence and ends with them feeling isolated. Thus, having to succeed within norms established without consideration for their needs and experiences often creates personal, professional, and emotional challenges.

INTRODUCTION

A significant emotional event (SEE) is an experience that disrupts one's emotional, spiritual, and physical being (Massey, 2014). In essence, such an event causes one to 'see,' that is, to consider, examine, and possibly change behaviors and even value systems. A SEE disrupts one's patterns, causing changes in thought processes and behaviors.

For the last two and a half years, the world has been trying to identify ways to deal with the significant emotional events of COVID-19 and the racial reckoning spurred on by the killing of George Floyd in the summer of 2020. We refer to both of these events as pandemics. This dual pandemic has pushed us to alter our behaviors and, in some cases, our value systems to address the environmental, economic, and social impact of both. For Black women (BW), this dual pandemic exacerbates the already tenuous environments in which they live and operate, adding more landmines to already complicated minefields. Although not literal, these minefields, especially the ones encountered in their work environments, contain landmines that are as dangerous and deadly as those in the war zone.

Due to the so-called 'awakening' caused by this dual pandemic, organizations have scrambled to re-energize initiatives in hopes of addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) challenges with the underlay of COVID-19 (Middaugh, 2021; Talan, 2022). The challenge remains in just that: organizations have decided to re-energize initiatives instead of rebuilding or developing initiatives with the new information provided by the current times. This is a challenge not only because it can be argued that organizations never fully honed or developed adequate infrastructures to support initiatives that address DEI but also because re-energizing initiatives would require organizations to develop avenues for discourse, learning, and reflection. It is the experience of many BW that although organizations have engaged in these DEI initiatives, even hiring numbers of DEI practitioners, BW are still waiting to see and feel improvement in this realm (Jackson, 2022). Many DEI hires experience issues because they are relegated to developing, communicating, and enforcing diversity-related initiatives in an environment that does not grant them the power to operate (Drake-Clark, 2009). Sadly, this speaks to the organizational culture manifested through company messaging, leadership behaviors, and employee interactions. Through this chapter, we explore the current state of emotional intelligence (EI) within organizations, the experience of BW within these organizations, and also provide recommendations for organizations to close the gap.

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