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Beyond Allyship

“I don’t need an Ally, I need an Accomplice!” As I listened to Dr. Yaba Blay being interviewed on the We Can Do Hard Things podcast I thought yes, if we want to influence creating equity for all women in the workplace, the approach of engaging and confronting bias needs to be part of our communication toolkit and we need to be prepared to use it.

As National Women’s Month ends and recent events unfold, we are reminded of the importance of taking action in support of women in the workplace, especially women of color. While the common sentiment surrounding women’s issues prioritizes awareness, that only goes so far when combatting deep seated biases and oppression in professional environments.

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Last week was Ketanji Brown Jackson’s Supreme Court confirmation hearing. Rather than ask about her qualifications, Republican senators asked her questions unrelated to the job, designed to provoke her in some way. The hearing was highly criticized online, with many viewers noting previous candidates were not scrutinized to the same degree as Brown Jackson. Despite her decades of experience and being one of the most qualified candidates in the court’s history, there were still people trying to diminish her value as she was forced to endure the situation with little to no support.

Women – especially women of color – regularly encounter bias at work, which hinders their performance and impacts their sense of belonging within the

company. Biased behavior can negatively impact innovation, efficiency, company reputation and the psychological state of those targeted. The key to solving this problem does not lie with awareness, but instead with courageous action.

About 25 years ago, while working for a Fortune 500 company, I was in a conversation with my manager who falsely claimed “black people’s brains are scientifically proven to be less developed than other people.” I thought to myself how wrong what he was saying was. HR eventually got involved and he was terminated for various issues, but what I remember most about the situation is that I had done nothing to directly challenge his statements. I stayed silent rather than risking my positive rapport with this person, risking upsetting him, or risking not getting promoted. I chose to maintain the status quo.

Moments such as these serve as a healthy reminder that we can all do more to combat workplace bias, even if that means getting uncomfortable and putting our own sense of security at risk. That is why I developed the Breaking Thru Bias program, which is designed to not only educate employees about the signs of workplace bias but also develop strategies for what to say when you see bias at play. Tackling bias through adapting, educating and engaging has the power to move the needle of inequity and challenge outdated work cultures, while providing women and other marginalized groups with much needed support. As you reflect on the culture of your company ask yourself the following questions:

- How do I react when I experience or witness biased comments and actions in the workplace?
- Where/what was a moment where I could have educated or engaged a perpetrator of bias but chose not to? What was I afraid of losing?
- What am I willing to risk in order to create an equitable work environment?

I wish I could redo that conversation moment 25 years ago but I can’t. However, I can make a commitment to not staying silent again.

Listen to Dr. Blay’s full interview on the We Can Do Hard Things podcast [here](#).

[Bias Attitude Indicator](#)



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